

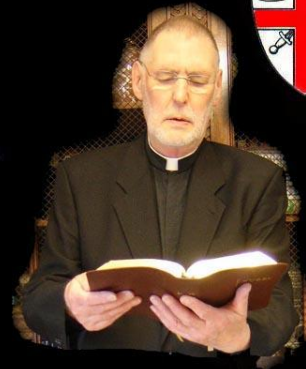


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**Thy Word is a lamp unto my feet
and a light unto my path.
Psalm 119: 105**



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Evangelical House Churches

Berea Bible Handbook – Part Thirteen

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Exposition on the Acts of the Apostles

by Arno C. Gaebelein (1861-1942)

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The Acts of the Apostles is the second book written by Luke and serves as a sequel to his Gospel. Acts follows the Gospel of John and precedes the Letter of Paul to the Romans in the New Testament.

Introduction

| Chronological Chart | Acts of the Apostles | Author: Luke |
|---|-----------------------------|---------------------------|
| | | All dates are approximate |
| Events | Acts | Dates |
| Ascension | 1:9-11 | A.D. 30 |
| Pentecost | 2:1-41 | A.D. 30 |
| Early church | 2:42-6:7 | A.D. 30 |
| First persecution | 4:1-31 | A.D. 31 |
| Second persecution | 5:17-42 | A.D. 32 |
| Third persecution; Stephen's martyrdom | 6:8-8:4 | A.D. 35-36 |
| Philip's ministry in Samaria and to the Ethiopian | 8:5-40 | A.D. 36 |
| Paul's conversion | 9:1-21 | A.D. 37 |
| Paul in Damascus, Jerusalem, Tarsus | 9:22-30 | A.D. 38 |
| Peter at Caesarea | 10:1-11:18 | A.D. 41 |
| Founding of Gentile church at Antioch | 11: 19-24 | A.D. 41 |
| Paul in Antioch | 11:25-26 | A.D. 43 |
| Martyrdom of James; Peter imprisoned | 12:1-19 | A.D. 44 |
| First missionary journey | 13:1-14:28 | A.D. 45-47 |
| Jerusalem council | 15:1-29 | A.D. 50 |
| Second missionary journey | 15:36-18:22 | A.D. 51-54 |
| Third missionary journey | 18:23-21:19 | A.D. 54-58 |
| Paul arrested in Jerusalem | 21:20-23:22 | A.D. 58 |
| Paul a prisoner at Caesarea | 23:23-26:32 | A.D. 58-60 |
| Paul's journey and arrival in Rome | 27:1-28:31 | A.D. 60-61 |

Between the ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ and the church as it emerged into the full current of history there is a tremendous gap. How did it happen that the followers of Jesus, who were obscure provincial Galileans and Judeans, became world figures? What changed the timidity that drove these men to denial and flight at the crucifixion into a boldness that made them stalwart apologists for a new faith? How did preachers who were confessedly "unlearned and ignorant men" (Acts 4:13) make such an impact on the world that they created an entirely new culture that reshaped the face of all Western civilization? What was the

origin of the theological truths contained in the New Testament and preached by the early missionaries? How is the teaching of the Epistles related to the teaching of the Gospels? How did it happen that a movement that began among Jews, that centered in a Jewish Messiah, and that was founded on the Jewish Scriptures became a religion espoused largely by Gentiles, as it is today ?

These and similar questions are answered by the book of Acts, which is the only existing link between the ministry and teaching of Christ and the Christianity that appears full-blown in the epistles of Paul and of the other New Testament writers.

“When the Constitutional Church connects to Ultimate Power”

God’s church is the appointed agency for the salvation of humanity. It was indented and organised as such for service, and its mission to carry the gospel to the whole world. From the beginning it has been God’s plan that through His church shall be reflected to the world His fullness and sufficiency. The members, rather the believers in His Church, those whom He has called out of darkness into His wondrous light, are to show forth His glory. The church is the repository of the riches of Christ’s grace; and through the church will eventually be made manifest, even to “the principalities and powers in heavenly places,” the final and full display of the love of God. (Ephesians 3:10)

The Book of Acts which we are now studying is the second volume of a two part work of which the first volume is the Gospel of Luke. Both books are based on the same general plan. Luke’s claim is to ‘have traced all things accurately from the first’ (Luke 1.3) and to be concerned that his sources were both eyewitnesses and Christian teachers (Luke 1.2). This does indicate a determination to arrive at the facts, and to do it on the basis of what actually happened specifically from a Christian viewpoint. He is not therefore to be looked on as someone who just writes about things without taking the trouble to check his sources. He brings historical truth. But he does stress the fact that what he brings to light has the authority of leading Christian teachers behind it. Note the emphasis on the Apostolic witness. These men are witnesses to what they have ‘seen and heard’ (see Luke 7.22; Acts 4.20; 22.15 compare John 3.32; 1 John 1.3).

The Gospel of Luke can be seen as basically divided into three:

- The birth and rise of Jesus and His going out as the Great Prophet full of the Holy Spirit to minister to Israel and proclaim the Good News (1.1-9.50).
- The long ‘journey to Jerusalem’ followed by His triumphant entry into Jerusalem and revelation of Himself as God’s Son (9.51-20.18)

- Jesus' rejection, trial, crucifixion, resurrection and exaltation (20.19-24.53).

The Book of Acts similarly divides into three:

- Ministry to the Jews. The birth and rise of the church and its going out full of the Holy Spirit to minister to the Jews and proclaim the Good News, and finally its application to the Gentiles. In this part Jesus commissions and empowers His Apostles from Jerusalem and they spread the word throughout Jerusalem, Judaea, Samaria and Galilee, finally including Gentiles who live in Caesarea, leading up to Jerusalem's second and final rejection of their Messiah (1.1-12.24). The Jewish leaders thought themselves too wise to need instruction, too righteous to need salvation, too highly honoured to need the honour that comes from Christ. The Saviour turned from them to entrust to others the privileges they had abused and the work they had slighted. God's glory must be revealed, His word established. Christ's kingdom must be set up in the world. The salvation of God must be made known in the cities of the wilderness; and the disciples were called to achieve the work that the Jewish leaders had failed to do.
- Ministry to the Gentiles. The Spirit commissions and empowers Paul and his compatriots from Syrian Antioch and in two missionary journeys they spread the word, first throughout Cyprus and Asia Minor, and then throughout Europe (12.25-18.22). Central to these ministries is the declaration of the freedom of the Gentiles from the Law (15). This section has a postscript with reference to ministry to the Disciples of John the Baptist. In this postscript to this section a replacement is raised for Paul, as he begins his journey towards Jerusalem and Rome, the disciples of John the Baptist are incorporated into the church, and we have a resume of the proclaiming of the Good News which is revealed as greater than that of John (18.23-19.20).
- Paul commences a journey to Jerusalem which will lead to Rome (19.21), and which will finally result in his being arraigned before Caesar, but meanwhile results in his triumphant ministry before kings and rulers, and then in Rome itself (18.23-28.31).

Each of these three sections of Acts follow a deliberate pattern:

SECTION 1. The Ministry to Israel and The Way Opened to the Gentiles: The Ministry Issues From Jerusalem Until Jerusalem Is Rejected (1.1-12.24).

This section is arranged on the following chiastic pattern:

- A. Jesus speaks of the things concerning the Kingly Rule of God (1.3). He is asked, 'Lord will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?' (1.6). His reply indicates that the present concern is to be the establishment of the Kingly Rule of God throughout the world in accordance with the teaching of Jesus, through the preaching of the word. Any other idea of a kingdom must be left with God.
- B. He declares the Great Commission - they are to be His witnesses and the Good News is to be taken to the uttermost parts of the world, and the resulting preparations for this are described (1.7-26).
- C. Through the resurrection and exaltation of Jesus, life is given to the people of God at Pentecost. God is among His people (2).
- D. The lame man is made to leap like a deer indicating that Messianic expectation is being fulfilled (3).
- E. Persecution comes under the High Priest and its results are described (4-5).
- F. Within this scenario comes sin within the church - Ananias and Sapphira (5.1-11).
- G. The ministry of the Hellenist Stephen (6).
- H. The pivotal speech of Stephen and his martyrdom (7).
- G. The ministry of the Hellenist Philip (8).
- F. Within this scenario comes sin within the church - Simon the Sorcerer (8.18-24).
- E. Persecution comes under the High Priest and its results are described (9.1-31).
- D. The paralysed man is made to walk (9.32-35).
- C. Through the resurrection, physical life is given to Tabitha - and spiritual life to Joppa - God is among His people (9.36-42).
- B. The Good News goes out to the Gentiles confirming that God has given to the Gentiles 'repentance unto life' (9.43-11.30).
- A. Israel choose their last and final earthly king in Jerusalem who is destroyed because of blasphemy and because he has attacked the Kingly Rule of God. The kingdom is definitely not to be restored to Israel, and from now on Jerusalem virtually drops out of the frame as a factor in the expansion of the Kingly Rule of God. Peter 'departs to another place'. (12).

It will be noted that in 'a' the proclamation of the Kingly Rule of God is emphasised, with the instruction that they should ignore the idea of an earthly Kingdom, while in the parallel 'a' at the end the Kingly Rule of God is contrasted with an earthly Kingdom of Israel, a Kingdom whose king is brought into judgment and whose people are rejected. In 'b' the commission is given that they are to go as witnesses to the end of the earth and in the parallel the Good News is opened to Gentiles ready for the fulfilment of this task. In 'c' the dead

bones of Israel receive new life, and in the parallel the dead are raised. The remaining parallels speak for themselves.

SECTION 2. Ministry to the Gentiles: The Spirit Commissions and Empowers Paul and His Compatriots from Syrian Antioch and They Spread the Word Throughout Cyprus, Asia Minor and Europe (12.25-18.22).

This also follows a chiastic pattern;

- A. Paul and Barnabas are sent forth from Antioch (12.25-13.3).
- B. Ministry in Cyprus results in their being brought before the pro-consul Sergius Paulus (13.4-13).
- C. Ministry in Pisidian Antioch results in a major speech to the Jews with its consequences, including those who desire to hear him again (13.14-52).
- D. Successful ministry in Iconium results in the crowd being stirred up and their having to flee (14.1-6).
- E. A remarkable healing in Lystra results in false worship which is rejected and Paul's stoning by the Jews, and leaving the city (14.7-20).
- F. Ministry in Derbe and a round trip confirming the churches and return to Antioch (14.21-28).
- G. The Gathering in Jerusalem of the Apostles and elders of Jerusalem, and the Antiochene representatives, resulting in acknowledgement that the Gentiles are not to be bound by the Law (15).
- F. Paul and Silas (and Barnabas and Mark) leave Antioch to go on a round trip confirming the churches (15.36-16.5).
- E. A remarkable healing in Philippi results in true worship which is accepted (the Philippian jailer and his household) and Paul's stripes being washed by the Roman jailer. The magistrates declare them innocent and Paul leaves the city (16.6-40).
- D. Successful ministries in Thessalonica and Berea result in the crowds being stirred up and their having to flee (17.1-14).
- E. Ministry in Athens results in a major speech to the Gentiles with its consequences, including those who desire to hear him again (17.15-34).
- B. Ministry in Corinth results in their being brought before the pro-consul Gallio (18.1-17).
- A. Paul returns to Antioch (18.18-22).

Ministry to the Disciples of John the Baptist and Activity In Ephesus Which Emphasises that The Work Goes On Unfailingly (18.23-19.20).

Here we have a summary demonstrating how all that has gone before continues, showing how God's work advances, commencing with the work of John the Baptist and proceeding to the present day. As a result men's eyes are opened,

and they are turned from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God (compare 26.18)

- A. The ministry of the disciples of John through Apollos leads up to the full proclamation of Jesus (18.24-28).
- B. The disciples of John the Baptist are incorporated into the church by the Holy Spirit coming on them (19.1-7).
- C. The Good News of Jesus is proclaimed to the Jews, who are revealed to be hardened (19.8-9a), and then to the Gentiles in a continually successful ministry so that all in Asia heard 'the word of the Lord' (19.9b-10).
- D. Great wonders and signs continue to be performed by God through Paul (whereas John did no miracle). Aprons and handkerchiefs (or headbands and leather belts) from his touch are God's instruments in the performing of such signs and wonders (19.11-12).
- C. False witnesses (who are Jewish) are defeated, and the name of the Lord, Jesus is magnified (19.13-17).
- B. The books which are the instruments of Satan are burned (19.18-19).
- A. The word of the Lord grows mightily and prevails (19.20).

In 'A' the ministry of John develops into the ministry of Jesus, and in the parallel mightily grows the word of God and prevails. In 'B' the disciples of John are immersed in the Holy Spirit, in the parallel the books which are the instruments of Satan are dealt with by being immersed in fire. ('He will immerse you in the Holy Spirit and in fire'). In 'C' the Jews as a whole are hardened and thus become false witnesses, while the Gentiles continually respond, and in the parallel the false witnesses who are Jews are defeated, while the name of the Lord Jesus is magnified. Central to all in 'D' are the signs and wonders which confirm Paul's ministry to be of God and to be continuing what happened at Pentecost. The pattern set here parallels the opening chapters of both Luke and Acts, the witness of John, the coming of the Spirit (Luke 3.22; 4.1), the expansion of the Word.

From this point on Paul purposes in the Spirit to go to Jerusalem on his way to Rome (18.21; 20.16, 22-23; 21.10-13, 17), and this will be followed by the Journey to Rome itself. The whole journey is seen by Luke deliberately to commence from the very centre of idolatry at Ephesus, where there is uproar and Paul is unable to preach, and deliberately to end in contrast with the triumph of a pure, unadulterated ministry in Rome. We can contrast how initially in Section 1 the commission commenced in a pure and unadulterated fashion in Jerusalem (1.3-9) and ended in idolatry in Caesarea (12.20-23).

Thus we could briefly summarise Acts as follows:

- The Great Commission is given in Jerusalem in the purity and triumph of Jesus' resurrection and enthronement as King which results in Jerusalem's rejection of Him and the false King's idolatrous response and judgment (1-12).
- The triumphant ministry to the Dispersion and the Gentiles (13-19.20).
- Paul's journey to Rome commences amidst rampant idolatry and comes to completion with him triumphantly proclaiming the Kingly Rule of God from his own house in Rome (19.21-28.31).

That being so this final section may be analysed as follows.

- A. Satan counterattacks against Paul's too successful Ministry in Ephesus and throughout Asia Minor and causes uproar resulting in Paul's ministry being unsuccessfully attacked by the worshippers of 'Artemis (Diana) of the Ephesians'. This city, with its three 'temple-keepers' for the Temple of Artemis and the two Imperial Cult Temples, is symbolic of the political and religious alliance between idolatry and Rome which has nothing to offer but greed and verbosity. It expresses the essence of the kingly rule of Rome. And here God's triumph in Asia over those Temples has been pictured in terms of wholesale desertion of the Temple of Artemis (mention of the emperor cult would have been foolish) by those who have become Christians (19.26) and will in the parallel below be contrasted and compared with Paul freely proclaiming the Kingly Rule of God in Rome (19.21-41).
- B. Paul's progress towards Jerusalem is diverted because of further threats and he meets with disciples for seven days at Troas (20.1-6).
- C. The final voyage commences and a great sign is given of God's presence with Paul. Eutychus is raised from the dead (20.7-12).
- D. Paul speaks to the elders from the church at Ephesus who meet him at Miletus and he gives warning of the dangers of spiritual catastrophe ahead and turns them to the word of His grace. If they obey Him all will be saved (20.13-38).
- E. A series of maritime stages and prophecy (verses 4 and 11) lead to Jerusalem follow (21.1-16).
- F. Paul proves his true dedication in Jerusalem and his conformity with the Law and does nothing that is worthy of death but the doors of the Temple are closed against him (21.17-30).
- G. Paul is arrested and gives his testimony of his commissioning by the risen Jesus (21.31-22.29).
- H. Paul appears before the Sanhedrin and points to the hope of the resurrection (22.30-23.9).
- I. He is rescued by the chief captain and is informed by the Lord that as he has testified in Jerusalem so he will testify in Rome (23.11).

- J. The Jews plan an ambush, which is thwarted by Paul's nephew (23.12-25).
- K. Paul is sent to Felix, to Caesarea (23.26-35).
- L. Paul makes his defence before Felix stressing the hope of the resurrection (24.1-22).
- K. Paul is kept at Felix' pleasure for two years (with opportunities in Caesarea) (24.23-27).
- J. The Jews plan to ambush Paul again, an attempt which is thwarted by Festus (25.1-5).
- I. Paul appears before Festus and appeals to Caesar. To Rome he will go (25.6-12).
- H. Paul is brought before Agrippa and gives his testimony stressing his hope in the resurrection (25.23-26.8).
- G. Paul gives his testimony concerning his commissioning by the risen Jesus (26.9-23).
- F. Paul is declared to have done nothing worthy of death and thus to have conformed to the Law, but King Agrippa II closes his heart against his message (26.28-32).
- C A series of maritime stages and prophecy (verses 10, 21-26) follow (27.1-26).
- D. Paul speaks to those at sea, warning of the dangers of physical catastrophe ahead unless they obey God's words. If they obey Him all will be delivered (27.27-44).
- C. Paul is delivered from death through snakebite and Publius' father and others are healed, which are the signs of God's presence with him, and the voyage comes to an end after these great signs have been given (28.1-13).
- B. Paul meets with disciples for seven days at Puteoli and then at the Appii Forum (28.14-15).
- A. Paul commences his ministry in Rome where, living in peace and safety, he has clear course to proclaim the Kingly Rule of God to all (28.16-31).

Thus in 'A' the section commences at the very centre of idolatry which symbolises with its three temples (depicted in terms of the Temple of Artemis) the political and religious power of Rome, the kingly rule of Rome, which is being undermined by the Good News which has 'almost spread throughout all Asia' involving 'much people'. It begins with uproar and an attempt to prevent the spread of the Good News and reveals the ultimate emptiness of that religion. All they can do is shout slogans including the name of Artemis, but though they shout it long and loud that name has no power and results in a rebuke from their ruler. In the parallel the section ends with quiet effectiveness and the Good News of the Kingly Rule of God being given free rein. This is in reverse to section 1 which commenced with the call to proclaim the Good News of the

Kingly Rule of God (1.3) and ended with the collapse of the kingly rule of Israel through pride and idolatry (12.20-23).

In 'B' Paul meets with God's people for 'seven days, the divinely perfect period, at the commencement of his journey, and then in the parallel he again meets with the people of God for 'seven days' at the end of his journey. Wherever he goes, there are the people of God. There is a colony of Heaven.

In 'C' God reveals that His presence is with Paul by the raising of the dead, and in the parallel reveals His presence by protection from the Snake and the healing of Publius.

In 'D' we have a significant parallel between Paul's warning of the need for the church at Ephesus to avoid spiritual catastrophe through 'the word of His grace' and in the parallel 'D' the experience of being saved from a great storm through His gracious word, but only if they are obedient to it, which results in deliverance for all.

In 'E' and its parallel we have Paul's voyages, each accompanied by prophecy indicating God's continuing concern for Paul as he journeys.

In 'F' Paul proves his dedication and that he is free from all charges that he is not unfaithful to the Law of Moses, and in the parallel Agrippa II confirms him to be free of all guilt.

In 'G' Paul give his testimony concerning receiving his commission from the risen Jesus, and in the parallel this testimony is repeated and the commission expanded.

In 'H' Paul proclaims the hope of the resurrection before the Sanhedrin, and in the parallel he proclaims the hope of the resurrection before Felix, Agrippa and the gathered Gentiles.

In 'I' the Lord tells him that he will testify at Rome, while in the parallel the procurator Festus declares that he will testify at Rome. God's will is carried out by the Roman power.

In 'J' a determined plan by the Jews to ambush Paul and kill him is thwarted, and in the parallel a further ambush two years later is thwarted. God is continually watching over Paul.

In 'K' Paul is sent to Felix, to Caesarea, the chief city of Palestine, and in the parallel spends two years there with access given to the 'his friends' so that he can freely minister.

In 'L' we have the central point around which all revolves. Paul declares to Felix and the elders of Jerusalem the hope of the resurrection of both the just and the unjust in accordance with the Scriptures.

It will be noted that the central part of this chiasmus is built around the hope of the resurrection which is mentioned three times, first in 'h', then centrally in 'L' and then again in 'H', and these are sandwiched between two descriptions of Paul's commissioning by the risen Jesus (in 'G' and in the parallel 'G'). The defeat of idolatry and the proclamation of the Kingly Rule of God have as their central cause the hope of the resurrection and the revelation of the risen Jesus.

What is the Book of Acts About?

It is often stated that the book is misnamed because it concentrates on Peter and Paul and is not about the 'Acts of the Apostles'. But that is not fully true. Luke is actually at pains to point out in the first chapters of the book that all the Apostles are acting as one. He certainly sees in this the 'Acts of the Apostles'.

Consider for example:

- It was to all the Apostles that Jesus appeared when He called on them to go out to the uttermost parts of the earth with the Gospel (1.8).
- The Apostles stood with Peter on the day of Pentecost and partook in the incredible infusion and in the other tongues and stood with him as he spoke (2.1-14).
- The Apostles as a whole taught the early believers (2.41).
- It was through all the Apostles that wonders and signs were done (2.43).
- It was the Apostles and those who were with them who prayed that God would cause His word to be spoken boldly, accompanied by signs and wonders in the name of God's holy Servant, Jesus (4.29-30).
- It was the Apostles who stood and preached in Solomon's porch when none dared join with them, and were held in high honour by the people (5.12).
- It was the Apostles who were arrested and imprisoned, and who were released from prison by an angel during the night (5.18-19), and went back at daybreak to the Temple, boldly to continue their ministry (5.21).
- It was the Apostles who were set before the council and questioned (5.27), and who, when they were reminded that they had been charged not to preach in the name of Jesus, replied that they had no alternative but to do so (5.28-32).
- It was the Apostles who were beaten, and charged not to speak in the name of Jesus and who were let go, and who subsequently rejoiced that they were counted worthy to suffer for the Name, and continued preaching and teaching (5.40-42).

- It was the Apostles who insisted that no hindrance should be put on their teaching ministry (6.2) and who appointed the servers.
- It was the Apostles who remained in Jerusalem when persecution caused the believers to be scattered (8.1).
- It was the Apostles who determined to send Peter and John to oversee the ministry among the Samaritans (8.14). (Note how Peter is subject to the authority of all the Apostles).
- It was the Apostles who, with the elders, formed a part of the general assembly and made the decision to accept Gentiles without circumcision and not put on them the whole burden of the ceremonial Law (15).

Thus the first part of the book (1.1-9.31) is clearly in Luke's eyes the 'Acts of the Apostles', even though Peter is the leading spokesman. Peter's sole ministry, along with some disciples, then comes into prominence in 9.32-11.18. And from then on the prominence falls on Paul and Barnabas (13.1-15.39), followed by Paul and Silas with Timothy (15.40-21.26), because they go to the Gentiles, with the final chapters concentrated on Paul's arrest and journey to Rome (21.27-28.31).

In a very real sense then the book contains the Acts of the Apostles, first of all the Apostles, then of Peter, then of Paul and Barnabas, then of Paul and Silas and then finally of Paul in his captivity.

Can we have Confidence in Luke's Accuracy?

The first point that we do need to note is that Luke does claim to have taken great care to ensure the accuracy of the facts on which he based his history. He wanted it known that what he wrote was on the basis of carefully researched facts, and that he did so because so much had been written and he felt that it was necessary to sift what was true from what was not (Luke 1.1-4). If we are to be fair to him this is something that we must not overlook. We must accept that either he was a barefaced liar, or he did take great trouble to sift fact from fiction.

Furthermore, contributing to our confidence in what he wrote is the undoubted fact that the writer has been shown to be historically accurate in his use of terms. He clearly knew his way about very complicated structures of the Roman Empire. He knew that a proconsul was in charge of Cyprus at the time when Paul was there. He knew that the officials at Philippi were called strategoi. At Thessalonica he correctly refers to the politarchs. At Malta the chief man is correctly referred to as the primus. While at Ephesus he rightly calls the controllers of religious affairs Asiarchs. All these diverse titles have been confirmed archaeologically. He also knew that (at this period in history only) Iconium was not in Lycaonia. Thus we know that he was always precise and

accurate in his use of such titles and place names in a world which was by no means straightforward. He has proved himself to be very competent, at least in this regard.

We also know that he reveals a good knowledge of Roman law and medical practise, and that his familiarity with geographical, political and territorial details in the areas of which he speaks is clear and verifiable. In the light of the complicated world of that day, all this can only be looked on as evidence that the writer gave careful consideration to the facts and knew what he was talking about. We are thus able to conclude that he was not just a hearer of stories. He was someone who looked carefully into what he wrote about.

The Spirit's Work In Luke and Acts.

The first thing that we must draw attention to about both his books (Luke and Acts) is that they each commence with a great emphasis on the new work of the Spirit which was taking place in the days of which they write, which was then mainly assumed as going on in the remainder of each book, with but an occasional reminder necessary to confirm it. And while the happenings at Pentecost in Acts 2 in one sense open up a new era, they are seen as by no means the beginning of the work of the Spirit. The emphasis is rather on a second surge of the Spirit, following on the one which was the mainspring of the life and ministry of Jesus Christ. But whereas the first resulted in a Spirit filled Jesus carrying forward a Spirit filled ministry, so that His disciples participated in the Spirit through Him (they were born from above and cast out evil spirits and healed), Acts reveals directly Spirit filled Apostles as carrying it on. In Luke the Holy Spirit descended visibly on Jesus. In Acts the Holy Spirit descends visibly on His Apostles.

The beginning of Luke's Gospel laid great emphasis on the work of the Spirit. John the Baptist was described as "filled with the Holy Spirit from his mother's womb" (Luke 1.15). The word for 'filled' is *pimplemi* which always refers to a special gift for a particular occasion or ministry. In other words John was prepared from birth to be the instrument of God's sovereign work, working by the power of the Spirit. He would walk "in the spirit and power of Elijah" (Luke 1.17). But he would do no miracles (John 10.41). It was not yet the new age. The Spirit's power was rather revealed in the success of his preaching. Notice in the prophecy of John's birth the contrast between strong drink and the Holy Spirit (Luke 1.15). Paul the Apostle also points out that the man who would be filled by the Spirit must avoid excess of wine (Ephesians 5.18).

The power within John as a result of the permanent fullness of the Spirit would be all the stimulation that he needed, and would enable him to "turn many of the sons of Israel to the Lord their God" so as to prepare a people for the Lord's

coming (Luke 1.14-17). As he grew the 'hand of the Lord' was 'with him' (Luke 1.66; compare Psalm 89.21, Acts 11.21). This would remind Luke's readers of Elijah (1 Kings 18.46) and Ezekiel (1.3 and often), although the preposition here is different signifying a more permanent, but less outwardly emphatic an experience.

It was not, however, only on John that the Spirit was depicted as coming. Luke seems at pains in his first chapters to stress the new activity of the Spirit. The coming age, the age of the Spirit, was seen as dawning. Elizabeth (Luke 1.41) and Zechariah (1.67), his mother and father, were also "filled (pimplemi) with Holy Spirit" and prophesied, while Simeon, an aged servant of God, was described as having Holy Spirit 'upon him' (Luke 2.25). Indeed the Spirit had revealed to Simeon that he would not die until he had seen the coming king (2.26). It was in preparation for that King, that the Spirit was at work. And when the baby Jesus was taken to the Temple in accordance with God's law, Simeon was 'inspired by the Spirit' to go there. It is stressed that he was righteous and devout, and looking for 'the consolation of Israel' (2.25), as were Elizabeth and Zechariah (1.6) and a number of others in Jerusalem (1.38), including a godly prophetess (1.36-37). Thus in Luke the Spirit prepared for Jesus.

Being "filled with the Holy Spirit" is seen to be a temporary experience for Elizabeth and Zechariah, enabling them to prophesy the once, while it is a permanent experience for John, the specially chosen instrument of God's purpose. The fact that he is filled with the Spirit from birth demonstrates that in him God had begun the new work of the Spirit in Sovereign power without outside intervention, even from John. It was all God's work. The same continuing idea of sovereign power carries on in Acts. The phrase "filled (Gk. pimplemi) with Holy Spirit" is clearly synonymous with the phrase "the Spirit of the Lord came upon --" in the Old Testament (e.g. in Judges). There also it was usually temporary, but could be permanent in certain cases, and was for those chosen out for special service, or for a special prophetic word.

This phrase is used in Acts in a similar way, thus identifying the experiences of Acts with those of the past. In this regard we must distinguish "being filled (pimplemi) with the Holy Spirit" (2.4; 4.8; 4.31; 13.9), which is limited to certain people, is always for some only, is for a specific purpose, and very often occurs in a particular circumstance, and is mainly with rare exceptions temporary, and "being filled (pleroo) (13.52) and therefore full (pleres) (6.3, 5; 7.55; 11.24) of the Holy Spirit" which is a more general and continuing experience, is for all, and produces general spiritual benefit, the latter being in mind in Ephesians 5.18.

When Jesus was to be born Mary was told, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you. And the power of the Most High will overshadow you, Therefore the child

who is to be born will be called holy, The Son of God.” (Luke 1.35). Thus it was through the Holy Spirit’s activity that Jesus came into the world.

John began his preparatory ministry with great success. People flocked to him from Jerusalem, Judaea and Galilee and he called them to change their ways in readiness for the One who would come. He made it clear that he was only the preparer of the way. He had come to call men to turn from sin, and, as a sign of a changed heart and mind, to be baptised (drenched) in water for the forgiveness of sins, but with the promise that the Greater One who was coming “will baptise (drench) you with Holy Spirit and with fire.” (Luke 3.16 compare Matthew 3.11). The thought here is of comparison with the life-giving rain and the fires of purification and judgment, two Old Testament themes. This will produce the harvest of wheat to be gathered in, while the fire will burn up the useless chaff (Luke 3.17). But he stressed that he was preparing for the coming of Jesus Who ‘will drench men in the Holy Spirit’. That is what his baptism pointed to. All this resulted from the fact that John the Baptist had been filled with the Holy Spirit from the womb.

Furthermore we should note that Jesus made clear that the Kingly Rule of God (Heaven) was available through John’s preaching from the beginning. According to Him the tax collectors and prostitutes who heard John and repented went into the Kingly Rule of God, preceding any Pharisees who repented later (Matthew 21.31-32).

When Jesus went into the water to be baptised, as He came out “the Holy Spirit came down on him in a bodily shape like a dove” (Luke 3.22 compare Matthew 3.16; Mark 1.10). At the same time a voice from Heaven said, “You are My son, My beloved, in whom I am well pleased.” This immediately linked Jesus with the kings of Israel/Judah who were crowned with the words, “You are my son --” (Psalm 2.7), along with the promise of eventual worldwide rule. Thus He is depicted as the king who is coming, upon whom will rest the Spirit of the Lord (Isaiah 11.2) resulting in wisdom and understanding. The final part of the sentence links with Isaiah 42.1, the promise of a coming Servant of God who will have God’s Spirit upon him and proclaim God’s justice to the nations of the world. (The final destiny of this Servant is found in Isaiah 53). So Jesus was from the commencement of His ministry seen as both King and Servant and endowed with the Spirit of God.

Jesus returned from the Jordan ‘full (pleres) of the Holy Spirit’ (Luke 4.1), something which would carry Him through His ministry, and it was by the Holy Spirit that He was led into the wilderness (Luke 4.1) to face up to the temptations of Satan and the significance of His ministry. He began His ministry in the power of the Spirit (Luke 4.14) and immediately proclaimed Himself to be the anointed prophet on whom the Spirit of the Lord would rest as promised in

Isaiah 61.1-2 (Luke 4.18-20). He declared, “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me because He has anointed me to proclaim the good news to the poor. He has sent me to heal the broken hearted, to preach deliverance to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are bruised and to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord.”. This idea of the anointing of the Spirit on Jesus also appears in Acts 4.27; 10.38. Luke then brought out how exactly Jesus was carrying out this ministry of the great prophet. He taught the people with authority (4.32), He released the captives of the demons (4.33-36), He delivered those oppressed with diseases (4.38-40) and He proclaimed the good news of the Kingly Rule of God (4.43 compare Matthew 11.4-6). The new age was commencing.

It is made quite clear then that His ministry was to be in the power of the Holy Spirit. But having abundantly and quite clearly established that the new work of the Spirit was taking place in a number of ways Luke now almost ceased to mention Him. In the remainder of Luke there is a remarkable silence about the Holy Spirit, especially in the last chapter. The reason for this can only be that having established the source of the power in Jesus’ ministry, Luke wanted all attention now to be turned on Jesus. Thus while he wants us to recognise that the Spirit’s work was going on through Jesus (‘full of Holy Spirit’) and in a continuing manner, at the same time he wants to put the focus on Jesus Himself, as the One Who has come uniquely from God and acts in God’s power so that He may go to Jerusalem and die, and rise again. Unlike all others His success comes from within Himself.

John’s Gospel in fact makes clear the continual nature of the Spirit’s work throughout (John 3.1-11; 4.1-26 based on the fact that God is Spirit; 6.63; 7.37-39), and stresses that the Spirit is given to Jesus in full measure with no restriction (John 3.34). Luke however presents things differently. In Luke Jesus does later rejoice over the fact that God has revealed His truths to the lowly, He does describe Him as rejoicing “in Spirit” (Luke 10.21), and we are probably justified in seeing here the idea of the joy-giving work of the Spirit (Ephesians 5.18-19). Luke also tells us that He promises his disciples that when they are dragged before accusing judges the Holy Spirit will teach them what to say (Luke 12.12; compare Matthew 10.20), and this must in context be seen as including while Jesus Christ was on earth. The Spirit is thus seen still to be there and active. But on the whole it cannot really be doubted that He is kept in the background by Luke from chapter 5 onwards.

That it is probably fair to say that there is in Luke’s Gospel from chapter 5 onwards a studied absence of mention of the Holy Spirit, comes out in that he deliberately translated the Aramaic as ‘the finger of God’ (Luke 11.20) where Matthew uses ‘the Spirit of God’ (Matthew 12.28) and even more emphatic is

the fact that while pointing to the coming pouring out of power from above during Jesus' resurrection appearances he seems specifically and deliberately to refrain from mentioning the Holy Spirit (Luke 24.49). In view of Acts 1 this can surely not be accidental. It would seem to us that the reason for this is twofold. Firstly, it is in order that, once he has established the new working of the Spirit, and has made clear that Jesus Himself is full of the same Holy Spirit, he might then concentrate all the attention on Jesus. Thus his Gospel from 4.1 onwards majors on Jesus and Jesus only. But secondly it is in order to allow for the greater impact on the reader of the second great surge of the Holy Spirit in Acts when His manifestation in power occurs as a new climactic event. The rather vague 'power from on high' with which the Gospel finishes is introduced in Acts as resulting from the powerful and effective drenching of the Holy Spirit. So much so that popular opinion often incorrectly sees Acts as when the Spirit commenced His work.

Acts can then overall at first be said to follow a similar pattern to Luke. Like Luke it commences by emphasising the drenching of the Holy Spirit connected with John the Baptist's ministry (1.5) and stresses that it will occur through Jesus' activity ('He will drench you in the Holy Spirit'), and he also emphasises that the Holy Spirit spoke through Jesus' ministry (1.2). Then he explains that the power from on high mentioned previously in the Gospel (Luke 24.49) will be because the Holy Spirit comes on His disciples (1.8), which then results in an epoch-making experience of the Holy Spirit in Acts 2. But then after that Acts follows up with abundant references to the Holy Spirit over a number of chapters (44 times in the first thirteen chapters). In these chapters the Holy Spirit is emphasised as working everywhere.

Reference to the Holy Spirit becomes less in the middle chapters (12 times in chapters 14-21), although still frequent enough to draw attention to His continued presence, and then after that there is no further reference to the Holy Spirit at all until we arrive in chapter 28, and there the reference is simply to the Holy Spirit as speaking through the Scriptures. Again this must be seen as significant, especially so as Paul's being brought before governors for the sake of Christ is undoubtedly one scenario where we might have expected mention of the Holy Spirit. For Luke 12.12 makes clear that it is in precisely such circumstance that the Holy Spirit will step in on behalf of His people.

This might to some extent be seen as due to his sources, but unless we accuse Luke of merely being an editor, which he most decidedly was not, that cannot be seen as sufficient explanation for the phenomenon. Nor does it explain why in chapter 19 there is a momentary reversal back to the experiences of the first chapters of Acts. The main reason, therefore would seem to be the impression that Luke is seeking to give. In the first part of Acts up to chapter 13 he places

all attention on the powerful, direct activity of the Holy Spirit, as He sweeps on in reaching out first to Jerusalem, then to Judaea and Samaria, then to the Gentiles as represented by Cornelius, and then in the commencement of the ministry of Paul. We are intended to see here the Holy Spirit working in irresistible and unceasing power. Nothing can prevent His activity. We are reminded of Isaiah's words, 'He will come like a rushing stream which the wind of the Lord drives' (Isaiah 59.19 RV RSV).

But then in the second part from chapter 14 onwards, while he intends us to see that the Holy Spirit is still active in guiding God's people, it is in a more gentle and controlled fashion (16.7, compare 13.2). Having irresistibly driven His people to recognise that Jew, Samaritan and Gentile must all be included in His saving work, and having brought it about by His powerful activity, and having filled both Paul and His people ready for the next stage, He is seen as consolidating His work among the Gentiles, still effectively, but more quietly. His message goes out to peoples and nations through Paul and his associates, and the Holy Spirit guides the church to a wise solution with regard to Gentile participation in the church (chapter 15), but it is only in 19.1-6 that we again sense the atmosphere of the early part of Acts.

Then in the last part of Acts, while God is still clearly in control and working out His sovereign purpose, the emphasis is no longer on the Holy Spirit but on man's activity (but always under God's control) in dragging Paul to Rome. It is that which is stressed and the Holy Spirit is not mentioned at all. (Satan is seen to be doing God's work for Him as he did in the crucifixion of Christ). The Holy Spirit could in fact have been mentioned a number of times, for Paul is brought before governors for Christ's sake (compare Luke 12.12), but Luke's silence deliberately brings out that it is men, not the Holy Spirit, who, having taken charge, are forced to bring about God's will in bringing Paul to Rome where he can proclaim the Kingly Rule of God. In these chapters Paul still speaks powerfully, and surely by the Holy Spirit, but that is no longer Luke's emphasis. His emphasis is now on man's sinfulness and brutality and on God's sovereignty. Man is seeking to direct God's affairs, but God overrules.

Having said this, throughout Acts the Spirit is seen as paralleling Jesus' ministry in teaching the people with authority (1.8; 2.4; 4.8, 31-33; 5.32 etc), releasing the captives of evil spirits (8.7; 16.18; 19.12), delivering those oppressed with diseases (3.1-11; 6.5-8; 19.12) and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom (8.12; 14.22; 19.8; 20.25; 28.23). The prophetic ministry of Jesus is thus clearly being carried on by the Apostles in the power of the Spirit. The Servant's work continues (13.47).

This all confirms that He wants us to concentrate on the work of the Holy Spirit as being that of carrying forward the movement from Jerusalem to Rome, with a

kind of hiatus occurring once Paul has been arrested. It is as though Luke sees Paul's arrest as having somehow interfered with that process, while at the same time being part of it.

The hiatus is powerful. It is not that he doubts that Paul's arrest is within God's purposes, only that he sees it as an indication of an interruption in the forward flow of the preaching of the Gospel, which God turns to His own account, and indeed He is behind it all the time. Although we may also be intended to see here an indication that Satan's hand is at work (26.18) but as one who is defeated (27.5).

Depending on when Luke wrote this could well have been helpful to his readers. By then the first exciting years had passed and they were having to face a world where the Holy Spirit was not quite so openly active, a world which was resistant to them, as it was to Paul in those final chapters. The sense that God was at work, even in the bleakest of circumstances, would have been a great encouragement to them.

So we may argue that Luke wants us to see that Paul's final journey to Rome, while being in God's purposes (23.11), was not a matter of being borne along by the Holy Spirit but of seemingly being borne along by the hand of men, although finally being something which God would turn to His own account. He is saying that while men might have appeared at this time to have taken over control so as to stem the onward moving work of the Spirit, God turned it to His own purposes. For in the end he makes it quite clear that all was in God's hands, and that it resulted in His sovereignty prevailing, with Paul being firmly established in Rome and able freely to proclaim the Kingly Rule of God at the very heart of the Roman Empire. Here again the Holy Spirit is mentioned (28.25), and he is seen as established for the purpose of proclaiming the Kingly Rule of God in Rome.

So what happened did not prevent God's work continuing. Witness was made to governors and kings, people were converted. There was thus still evidence of God's power. But what he wants us to see was that in general it was not God's positive purpose, but was brought about by man under God's sovereignty, with Him turning their evil purposes to good. It revealed that Paul was in his own way delivered out of the power of Satan to God (26.18).

We may compare this part of his life with the last days of Jesus, when Satan was active (Luke 22.3) in doing all that he could to destroy Him. But he makes clear that both Jesus and Paul triumphed in the end. God was in the experiences of both. We may also note that after the journey to Jerusalem in Luke Jesus' enemies were thwarted by the resurrection, while after Paul's journey to Rome

they were thwarted by Paul's being able to live in his own house and declare the Kingly Rule of God to both Jews and Gentiles.

These silent chapters at the end of the book demonstrate that while revealing the work of the Holy Spirit must be seen as one of Luke's main purposes in Acts it cannot be seen as the one central one, otherwise He would have been mentioned in these final chapters in places where mention of Him might be expected. The Holy Spirit's work is to be seen as only one aspect of the book, not its major theme.

The Language of Luke and Acts

Interestingly the same general picture of a change between two part of each book also applies to the language of both books, but with the split being very different. Speaking generally, in Luke's Gospel the first two chapters, although not the opening words of introduction, are suffused with Aramaic Greek, followed by the remainder in more general Greek. In Acts the first fifteen chapters can be said to give strong suggestions of Aramaic Greek while the remainder may again be said to be in more general Greek. To some extent this may well be seen as due to his sources, whether written or oral, (for parts of Acts 1-15 would mainly tend to come from witnesses who used Aramaic Greek, as would Luke 1-3), and to the use of the Septuagint and other Greek texts for the benefit of his readers (for both include much quotation from Greek texts). This would then suggest the careful way in which Luke did not alter his sources overmuch, while considering his readers. But that could be said to be equally true of the whole of Luke's Gospel, and yet that did not prevent Luke from putting it in more general Greek. It must be seen therefore as quite probable that Luke wanted chapters 1-2 to reflect the Old Testament prior to the commencement of Jesus' ministry, while feeling more at home in general Greek, and that he wanted parts of Acts 1-15 to reflect the mainly Jewish Christian background of that section of Acts, changing to more general Greek in Acts 16 onwards once the Jew-Gentile Christian conflict was officially resolved. It suggests that he was no mean author. He wanted us to recognise the source from which the church sprang, while at the same time emphasising that it eventually became universal.

The Significance of Jerusalem in Acts.

Luke has carefully constructed Acts in order to portray how Jerusalem fits into the purposes of God. He commences with it as the centre from which the witness of the Good News will go out, ever more widely, to the uttermost part of the earth (1.8). For a while it is then the centre of all activity. From 1.8-6.7 all is Jerusalem, and from 6.8-11.30 the Word of the Lord goes forth from Jerusalem and is overseen by Jerusalem.

But meanwhile the leaders of Jerusalem first reluctantly tolerate (4.13-23; 5.33-41) and then oppose the word and God's people (6.12; 8.1-3; 9.1-2), along with the Jews (6.9-13; 9.23, 29), until in chapter 12 Jerusalem as a whole finally rejects its Messiah and His people and chooses a false Messiah who is finally doomed for his blasphemy. It is significant that at this point, James the apostle having been martyred, Peter, seemingly the last of the Apostles in Jerusalem, 'went to another place' (12.17) and all evangelistic activity from Jerusalem ceases.

From this point on Syrian Antioch becomes the major centre for the mission of the Holy Spirit and the sending out of the word of the Lord. It is true that the church in Jerusalem (not Jerusalem itself which has been rejected) is called in. But this time it is not as the Jerusalem church overseeing the work, it is as the Apostles and elders advising what they consider to be the mind of God. And significantly it advises only in order to pronounce its own demise (15). The decision made here releases the Gentiles from any tie with Jerusalem and its Temple (but not the tie with the Jerusalem church).

And from this point on Luke only brings in Jerusalem in order to demonstrate that Paul, rejected by Jerusalem, with the gates of the Temple closed against him, goes from Jerusalem to Rome, (although he still stresses that the work of the church in Jerusalem and Judaea still prospers (21.20).

We may portray this in more depth as follows:

1). Jerusalem Is Blessed and Offered Its Messiah (1.8-6.7).

- The Spirit comes from above (2.1-4; 4.31).
- The world has come to Jerusalem (2.5-11).
- The Apostles proclaim the word to the Jewish world in Jerusalem (2.15-36; 3.12-26).
- The Apostles perform great signs and wonders in Jerusalem (2.43; 5.12).
- Jerusalem is the great centre of healing as people come from all parts (5.16).
- The Messianic signs are being fulfilled - the pouring out of the Spirit (2.1-4); - the Messianic banquet (2.46; 4.35; 6.1-6); - the Messianic signs (3.1-10; 4.30).
- The Sanhedrin itself is challenged with the Good News (4.8-12; 5.29-32)
- The 'church' (the assembly of God's people) is being firmly established in Jerusalem and growing rapidly and spreading (2.37-47; 4.32; 6.7).
- A Messianic judgment takes place (5.1-11).

All the prophecies concerning Jerusalem are thus being fulfilled.

2). The Word of the Lord Goes Out From Jerusalem (6.8-11.30).

The martyrdom of Stephen is then the signal for the word to go forth from Jerusalem as promised in Isaiah 2.2-4, as further prophecies are fulfilled. It goes out to Samaria (8.4-25), to Ethiopia (8.26-39), to the cities along the coast (8.40; 9.32-43), to Damascus (9.19-25). Churches are established and prosper throughout Judaea, Galilee and Samaria (9.31). And then finally the word goes to the Gentiles (10.1-48; 11.19-30).

3). Jerusalem Rejects Its Messiah For A False Messiah (12).

The hailing of a false Messiah and rejection of the true Messiah is clearly portrayed in chapter 12. (We are dealing here with Luke's portrayal making use of the historical facts). 'Herod the King' as the people pleaser attacks the Apostles, is hailed by the people (they approve his persecution of the Apostles) and he then allows himself to be exalted as a god. But the inevitable consequence is that he is judged and his judgment is final. Here we have the anti-Messiah (one who sets himself up in place of the Messiah) who worshipped Satan in order to receive his kingdom (Luke 4.6). What folly it proved to be. The only reason that Luke can have for bringing this in here, especially in view of the fact that Jerusalem now drops out of the reckoning, is in order to demonstrate that Jerusalem has forfeited its final opportunity by rejecting the Messiah and choosing the anti-Messiah. From now on the word of the Lord will go to the world and it will go from Antioch.

There is, however, a rather touching picture here of God's care for His people. Surrounding this description of affairs in Jerusalem in chapter 12, as Jerusalem loses its significance under God, is the description of the love and care of the church at Antioch for the church of Jerusalem (11.27-30; 12.25). It is as though the people of God in Jerusalem and Judaea are cocooned in their love. God has not forgotten them.

4). The Church of Jerusalem pronounces its Own Demise (15).

While they were probably not aware of it at the time, the gathering at Jerusalem of the Apostles and the elders with the representatives from Antioch in chapter 15 would release the tie that bound the world to Jerusalem. From this point on universally speaking even the church in Jerusalem was mainly redundant. It no longer had any purpose. Having given the world the Messiah they had nothing further to give. From this point on they just fade into the background, until finally historically they disappear into the wilderness to linger on as nonentities (except to God) as the destruction of Jerusalem approaches.

Paul sets His Face Towards Jerusalem and the Temple closes its Doors against Him and Jerusalem despatches Paul to Rome (19.21;20.16, 22; 21.4, 11-14, 17-26).

Considering these verses it is difficult to avoid the conclusion, firstly that Paul's 'journey to Jerusalem' (19.21;20.16, 22; 21.4, 11-14) in defiance of all warnings, in some way parallels that of Jesus Himself as portrayed in Luke's Gospel (Luke 9.51). Paul too is driven on by a compulsion that he cannot refuse, and yet not in his case to be present at the Passover, but in order to be present at Pentecost. Jesus was anticipating His sacrificial death, Paul was anticipating renewal of the Holy Spirit. And that secondly it is in order to portray the end of Jerusalem's influence. He arrives in Jerusalem and the Temple closes its doors against him (21.30) only for God (not Jerusalem) to despatch him to Rome in order that the word of the Lord and the proclamation of the Kingly Rule of God might go forth in Rome to both Jew and Gentile.

The whole situation is tense. He was clearly warned by the Spirit against going to Jerusalem (21.4, 11-12), and yet he insisted on going (21.13-14), and even 'purposed it in spirit' (or 'in the Spirit?') - 19.21), and declared that the Holy Spirit had him in bonds (20.22). He was seemingly driven on by an urge that he could not deny, his purpose being in order to participate in the anniversary of the day of Pentecost (20.16). We can only assume that his desire was to enjoy the celebrations of the anniversary of Pentecost with his fellow-believers in Jerusalem (as well as to deliver the Collection). And as we know, humanly speaking it ended up disastrously, with the lesson given that Jerusalem had nothing more to offer of the Holy Spirit and that the Temple closed its doors on God's messenger. However, as so often, God overruled what happened for good, and he ended up proclaiming the Kingly Rule of God in Rome.

The seeming purpose of Luke's detailed description of this can only surely be in order once and for all to stress the cessation of the importance of Jerusalem except as a place which rejects God's people because of its own fixations, while underlining the fact that the witness has gone from Jerusalem to Rome. Possibly also it was a warning to all Christian Jews of the danger of nostalgia for the past in view of what it did for Paul, the message being, 'let go of Jerusalem, otherwise it will be an albatross around your neck'. If this is so it would confirm that Acts was written before the destruction of Jerusalem when such a message would become almost irrelevant. The result would be that when that destruction came it caused hardly a ripple for the Christian church (except that it did then throw them more into the limelight as being non-Jews and therefore an illicit religion).

Luke's Aim in Producing Acts

Apart from wanting to report on the doings of the early church, and the advance of the Spirit, we may ask, what were Luke's purposes in writing Acts? While we must not reduce Luke's purpose to only one specific aim, for he is not to be so limited, there would certainly seem to be good grounds for seeing one main aim as being expressed in the words of the risen Jesus in 1.8, "But you shall receive power, when the Holy Spirit is come on you: and you shall be my witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea and Samaria, and to the uttermost part of the earth." He wanted the world to know that Jesus' words and God's purposes were being fulfilled. For there is no question but that the book of Acts does portray the witness about Jesus Christ being proclaimed in Jerusalem (1-7), moving to 'Judaea and Samaria' (8.1), with the ministry to Samaria then being overseen by Apostles (8.14-25), and finally going out into the Roman world, first through Peter with Cornelius (10-11), then with Paul's missionary journeys (13-21), then before kings and governors (21-27) and finally with the presence of an Apostle in Rome, dwelling there and proclaiming the Kingly Rule of God (28.31). And this is confirmed by 23.11, 'as you have borne witness concerning me at Jerusalem, so must you bear witness also at Rome'. God saw it as important that Testimony be given concerning His purposes in Jesus firstly at the centre of the Jewish world, and then at the centre of the Gentile world, and he wants us to see that the movement from the one to the other was with the approval of God. Indeed it is made clear that it was God Who made absolutely sure that Paul arrived in Rome.

We can compare here how in Luke the author laid great emphasis on the journey to Jerusalem. It was there that God would manifest His glory and provide the springboard for the future. In Acts the concentration is on movement from Jerusalem towards Rome, not in order to glorify Rome, but because Rome was the hub of the world, and while it must be recognised that the information given about the Samaritan ministry fits in badly with other aims, it does fit in with this one.

Furthermore the book makes clear that all this was due to the sovereign power of God. It is seen not to be a humanly planned scenario, but one forced on men by the power of God. Necessity forced the appointment of the Hellenistic Jews as ministers, one of whom began to preach to the Samaritans. Persecution drove the Christians out of Jerusalem, when they were settling down snugly to form their own Utopia. The angel of the Lord forcibly directed Philip to the Ethiopian eunuch. Paul was converted by the direct, enforced and unexpected appearance of Jesus to him. Two visions were responsible for Peter being called to meet Cornelius. The Holy Spirit called on the Antioch church to send out Barnabas and Paul. A vision of a man from Macedonia called Paul over to Macedonia.

Circumstances beyond his control, then stated to be of God (23.11), sent Paul to proclaim the Gospel before kings and governors, and then finally in Rome. It was all to be seen as of God.

But Acts not only speaks of the spread of the message concerning the Kingly Rule of God (1.3; 8.12; 14.22; 19.8; 20.25; 28.23, 31) over a wide area, it also stresses its growing impact within those areas. Thus it declares boldly that, "The Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved" (2.47). "The number of the disciples was multiplied" (6.1). "The word of God increased; and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem" (6.7). "Walking in the fear of the Lord and in the encouragement of the Holy Spirit, it was multiplied" (9.31). "The word of God grew and multiplied" (12.24). "So the churches were strengthened in the faith, and they increased in numbers daily" (16.5). "So the word of the Lord grew and prevailed mightily" (19.20). And it speaks of "the multitude of those who believed" (4.32). "The multitude of the disciples" (6.2). "Many believed in the Lord" (9.42). "Almost the whole city (Pisidian Antioch) came together to hear the word of God" (13.44). "The word of the Lord was spread abroad throughout all the region" (13.49). "All those who were in Asia (Minor) heard the word of the Lord" (19.10). So part of the emphasis of the book is undoubtedly on the fact that the word spread widely and was powerfully effective in all the areas which it reached.

Another parallel aim, although very similar, was equally certainly in order to portray that the proclamation of the new Kingly rule of God began with Jesus Christ, continued with the Apostolic ministry, with the first outreach being by the Jewish Christian Apostles to Jews, including the Jews of the Dispersion (Acts 2). Then under Jewish Christian Apostolic authority the witness is seen as expanding to Samaritans, and then finally to Gentiles, at which point the important decision was reached that those who united with the new Israel did not need to be circumcised or keep the ritual law. The proclamation of the Good News then expanded outwards among Gentiles until it was being successfully proclaimed by an Apostle in Rome on a continual basis to both Jew and Gentile. The Kingly Rule of God was being established in Rome.

Alongside this was emphasised the fact that to begin with in every city the ministry was to Jews first, which was a sensible procedure as it was in the synagogues that Jews could be found whose background had prepared them for the message, and there also God-fearers could be found, Gentiles who had been attracted by the monotheism and morality of the Jewish teachings but had not become proselytes, who were ripe for the Christian message of the fulfilment of Old Testament teaching in Jesus but without the need for circumcision. But eventually the Jews disqualified themselves from special treatment by their behaviour, so that the Gospel became more freely available on equal terms to

all. The old Israel having been given its opportunity the new Israel became separated from the old, although firmly founded on the Jewish Apostles (Ephesians 2.11-22) and in the end was freed from its grip and became the true Israel. Thus is emphasised Paul's injunction, 'to the Jew first and also to the Greek' (Romans 1.16). But the book ends with Paul emphasising that the fulfilment of Judaism is found in Christianity. Anything else is redundant.

This in fact paralleled the ministry of Jesus which was first for the Jews (Matthew 10.5-6; 15.24), but then after the incident of the Syrophoenician woman (Matthew 15.21-28; Mark 7.24-30) began to also include on its periphery Gentiles, although strangely enough this is stressed in Matthew and Mark rather than in Luke.

A third subsidiary aim would appear to have been in order to vindicate the Apostleship of Paul, that is to say, to demonstrate that Peter and Paul operated on equal terms and that Paul was approved by the Apostolate, for the first part of Acts largely centres on Peter, with Paul then taking over the centre stage with the approval of the Apostles, and parallels are clearly drawn in order to demonstrate that Peter and Paul performed the same ministry. But Acts cannot rightly be described as a life of Peter and Paul, for Peter drops from view after the Jerusalem Council. And while it is Peter who first goes as an Apostle to Judaea, Samaria and then to the Gentiles, it is Paul who goes extensively among the Gentiles, and finally goes as an Apostle to Rome.

Examples of parallels demonstrating their equal effectiveness are as follows:

- Both begin with the healing of a man lame from birth (3.2; 14.8)
- Both heal another man who has been ill for a long time (9.33ff. (long time palsied); 28.8 (a fever and bloody flux))
- Both heal many men at once, both directly (5.16; 28.9) and through different mediums (5.15 (by shadow) compare 19.12 (by handkerchiefs)).
- Both perform signs and wonders generally (2.43 5.12; compare 14.3; 15.12; 19.11).
- Both have encounters with sorcerers (8.18; 13.6).
- Both bring a dead person to life (9. 36-42; 20.9-12).
- Both perform a miracle revealing God's judgment (5.1-10 (died); 13.6-11 (blinded)).
- Both, by the laying-on of hands, confer the gift of the Holy Spirit (8.14-17; 19.1-7).
- Both bring about speaking in tongues (10.44-46 (while speaking); 19.6 (by laying on of hands)).
- Both have a vision which coincides with one experienced by another man (10.1-22; 9. 3-16).

- Both are miraculously delivered from prison (5.17-23; 12.3-11 (by angels secretly); compare 16.23-34 (by an earthquake).
- Both are scourged (5.40; 16.23).
- Both decline to be honoured/worshipped, and do so in fairly similar words (10.25f; 14.11-18).

The list appears to be impressive. On the whole, however, most of the above are what might be expected from men gifted and chosen as they were, operating in the circumstances of the day, and we should note the differences. Apart from the differences above we should note that he has not, for example, introduced in the case of Peter, as compared with Paul, a stoning (14.19), or threats against life (9.23-29; 14.5), or an exorcism (16.16-18), or in the case of Paul, as compared with Peter, that the Holy Spirit aided his defence against rulers (contrast 4.8) even though in the latter case he could have. Thus we must recognise that while he probably does select from the facts, he does not invent them or alter them in order to achieve his purpose.

Similarly, in respect of Paul, we should note that many of the items enumerated in 2 Corinthians 11.23-27; 12.12 are omitted. This last may be explained, at least in part, by the supposition that the writer had no definite knowledge about them. It would seem that he has, in fact, confined himself to matters genuinely preserved by tradition of which he was made aware by witnesses, and has not invented events or spoken by general hearsay. He has merely made a selection of what he did receive and put them into reasonable shape. But it also suggests that he was not interested in writing a complete life of Paul. For he could have obtained the information from Paul. What he was more interested in was the advance of the Gospel and the revelation of the power of God, first through Peter and then through Paul, until Apostolic ministry was established in Rome.

A fourth subsidiary aim was clearly in order to demonstrate that, while the unbelieving Jews were antagonistic to the church, and sought to bring it into disrepute, which explained why there were so many seemingly questionable incidents, (although this did not apply to all), the Roman authorities continually looked with favour on the church, rejected accusations against it and made its decisions in its favour, looking on it with general approval.

For example, in the third Gospel we have already found Pilate, a Roman governor, declaring that he found no fault in Jesus, a judgment confirmed by Herod, a Roman appointee, who in the other Gospels is not mentioned at all in connection with the examination of Jesus. Pilate then declares three times that he will release Jesus, and is prevailed on to pass adverse sentence only by the insistence of the Jews (Luke 23 1-25). In Acts, which has even been regarded by some as an apology for Christianity intended to be laid before Gentiles in Paul's defence, or as a general defence of Christianity before the authorities, Pilate is

again seen as having been determined to let Jesus go (3.13), the first converts of Peter and Paul are Roman officers (10.1;13.7), while it is the civil authorities who continually and definitely declare Paul not to be a political criminal in spite of the insistence of the Jews (18.14f: 19.37; 23.29; 25.18ff; 26.31ff) ; it is also by them that he is protected, in more than one instance, from conspiracies (18.12-17; 19.31; 21.31-36; 23.10, 22-33; 25.2-4), and it is made quite clear that he was welcome in Rome and was allowed to preach from his own home without being forbidden. The strong and continual emphasis on these latter instances certainly confirms that one aim of Acts is to clear Christianity of any charge of subversion made against it, and to demonstrate that it was a *religio licita*, an officially approved religion. But it can only be seen as one aim among many. For the large amount of material that does not contribute to this aim, and is clearly irrelevant to it, prevents us from seeing it as its main purpose.

A fifth aim, emphasised by the extent to which he introduces the teaching of others through their speeches, was clearly to bring home the message of these preachers to his readers. People wanted to know what Jesus had taught, and what the Apostles had taught. So, from his wide knowledge of this, Luke wanted to pass on to them what he knew and what he had learned. He was aware that the church were more interested in the words of Jesus and the Apostles than in what he thought, and humble enough to provide what they wanted (see Speeches in Acts below).

A sixth aim was that he wanted to remove from the minds of Christians the emphasis of some on the centrality of Jerusalem. The first few chapters of Acts major on Jerusalem, but then the work expands outwards as a result of persecution and by chapter 12 it is seen that Jerusalem is no longer the hub of the spreading of the word. That privilege has passed to Antioch. Apart possibly from chapter 15 Jerusalem becomes almost a backwater. While maintaining contact with Jerusalem, the church is freed from its hold.

A seventh subsidiary aim, although an extremely important one underlying the whole purpose of Acts so that it might even be seen as a main purpose, was in order to illustrate how people of all kinds personally came to Christ and found salvation through His name, and how testimony to Christ, with full details of what that testimony was, was given before men of all traditions and status. This was indeed at the heart of all that was happening. But in the end what was really of the deepest significance was undoubtedly the fact that the Gospel moved from Jerusalem to Rome under the auspices of God's duly appointed Apostles.

The Sources of Acts.

It is clear that Luke must have gathered the information in the first part of Acts from people who were present at what happened. He had good connections with

such people including among others both Mark and Philip the deacon, who had both been involved with the church from the beginning. And he would meet many others as he travelled around. He knew most of the companions of Paul at one time or another, would have met Peter, and as his set purpose was to write an accurate history, he would have taken the opportunities presented by his travels to discover and confirm all his facts (Luke 1.3).

Especially significant in Acts are the passages where the writer uses 'we', which on any reasonable interpretation suggests that the author was actually present at those times. These are found in 16.10-18; 20.5-16; 21.1-18; 27.1-28.16. Additional to these might be passages where 'we' would not have been expected because of the content of the passage.

So overall there is no really good reason to doubt that Luke was able to obtain accurate information from eyewitnesses for most of what he wrote, and was of course able to call on Paul for other information unobtainable elsewhere. Thus there are no real grounds for questioning the historical accuracy of the narrative.

Why is there so little indication in Acts of the controversies so prominent in Paul's Letters?

The reason that there is so little reference to controversies which early on affected the Christian church is to be found in the purpose of the book. It was intended to reveal the forward movement of the Gospel against all opposition, rather than to look at the controversies of the church arising from the original Jewishness of the church (although some indication of them is certainly given), for the latter would only have sidetracked the reader from the main aim. The point is being made that the church triumphed as one and that therefore the controversies were of little importance. What mattered was the continual advance and establishment of the Gospel, and the fact that a solution to the controversies was agreed on by the principle leaders of the church.

Why did Luke end the Book where he did?

The most obvious solution to this question would be that the point at which he ended was about the time at which Luke ended his writings. For if the book was written after the stoning of James the Lord's brother in Jerusalem had become generally known, or after persecution of Christians by Nero, or after Paul himself had been executed, or after the fall of Jerusalem, it might be thought hard to understand why none of these were at least mentioned. And yet we have already had cause to see that Luke can maintain a deliberate silence when it is within his literary purpose.

He had after all mentioned the martyrdom of James the Apostle (12.2), why not then that of James the Lord's brother at the hands of the Jews? Furthermore Nero's acts were despised by the people of Rome who suspected him of duplicity, and might therefore even have obtained sympathy for Christians, and would probably not have been counted against them, while Paul's martyrdom could have been a genuine comfort and strength to Christians in the face of their difficulties. And reference to the destruction of Jerusalem would have had a great impact in releasing Christianity from its original Jewish ties, as it certainly did for the Jerusalem church that fled to Pella, and would have indicated God's wrath against the Jews, and have finally distinguished the new message from the old. It would have been a fitting end to the journey from Jerusalem to Rome. Furthermore it must have been quite apparent, had Acts been written later, that anyone interested would know about the Neronian persecution and could soon check and discover what had happened to Paul, so that there was no point in pretending that they had not happened. Indeed such a book, ending like it does, might well have raised questions and resulted in an interest in the carrying out of such investigations. We might ask, if it was written later why does Luke not end with Paul in a place not quite open to such suspicion as being under guard by a Roman soldier?

But having said this it is always dangerous to suggest that an author must include certain things, just because it seems sensible to us, especially one who uses silence in his literary purposes. Possibly rather we need to review our ideas of what the book is aiming at. One possible explanation, apart from that which sees this as determining the date of the writing of the book, is that the writer had a particular aim in view, and that that aim might have been to demonstrate how the work of the early church had resulted in the establishment of the Kingly Rule of God in Rome along with a fruitful authoritative Apostolic ministry, which would have been seen by many in the early church as the ultimate of blessing and triumph. (To them Rome was the centre of all earthly things). It may be that he did not want anything to draw attention away from that. Thus he might have considered that any further information would have detracted from that message, that being the punch line at which he had been aiming. He might simply have in effect been saying, the next step will be the culmination in Heaven itself.

Indeed he might well have intended comparison with the way that Luke's Gospel had ended with the final work of Christ, something which had resulted from the activity of His enemies, and which had resulted in His resurrection triumph which all knew was a huge blessing. A parallel may therefore have been intended between Jesus' glorification in Heaven to the right hand of God as King, and Paul's exaltation on earth by God to his own house in Rome as a servant of Christ, from which to declare the Kingly Rule of God in Rome. The Messiah was enthroned in heaven, while God's rule could be seen as being

established on earth in Rome through Paul His representative. And no one in authority would be able to suggest that Paul had come to Rome with evil intent, for it was by Caesar's choice, and not by his own, that he had come. Thus anything that followed might have been seen as irrelevant or indeed as being a hindrance to the emphasising of this message. Perhaps he wanted it to be established that despite everything that man could do, God ruled in Rome.

Of course there was a church in Rome long before Paul arrived, for he wrote to them, and we do not know how it was established, (probably as a result of Christians moving or travelling to Rome) but the point being made here may have been the establishing of Apostolic authority, in other words Messiah's authority, in Rome under God.

Furthermore, to record Paul's death might also have been seen as unsuitable for a different reason. Luke's Gospel ended with an emphasis on the death of Jesus, followed by His resurrection. It may well be that he felt that to end Acts with the martyrdom of Paul, as though his death could be paralleled with that of Jesus, might wrongly have suggested an equation between the two, which would not have been seen as acceptable, as Jesus' death was unique. Comparison might have been seen as odious, as detracting from the message of the cross.

But silence concerning all four powerful events must unquestionably raise the thought in our minds of the very real possibility that the book ended here precisely because, events having reached the climax that Luke was looking for, he proceeded immediately to write his book.

Why does Luke not draw attention to the "Atoning Significance of the Cross"?

Much has been made of Luke's failure to draw attention to the atoning significance of the cross. However, this is not a strictly accurate assessment, for there are certainly occasions when he does so. He cites the words of Jesus, 'this is my body which is given for you' and speaks about the new covenant in His blood (Luke 22:19-20). He cites the words of Isaiah 53.12, 'he was reckoned among the transgressors' as referred by Jesus to Himself, and the atoning significance of this idea in the context of Isaiah could hardly be overlooked (Luke 22.37). He informs us that Jesus pointed out that 'the Messiah should suffer, and rise again from the dead the third day, and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name to all the nations' (Luke 24.46-47), which connects the two ideas. And in Acts 20:28 the church of God has been 'purchased with His own blood'. So Luke tends to let his sources speak for him. At the same time he might not have seen the presentation of the doctrine of the atonement as his main purpose, except generally in his emphasis on the cross. Once Theophilus and his other readers had been attracted to the

resurrected Christ and His church, then would be the time to stress the doctrine of the atonement.

But Acts certainly proclaims that it is through the death and resurrection of Jesus that men find life (2.23-24, 33, 38). Compare also 13.29-30 with 37-39 where His death and resurrection are the means of men's justification apart from the Law. This was preaching which offered eternal life (13.46). And he emphasises that salvation is by the grace of God and not through circumcision and legalism (15.10-11). Furthermore in many places these connections are simply assumed. Thus it is only true to say that Luke does not put a continual strong emphasis on the atonement, not that he does not include the idea at all. His emphasis is on the resurrection. But without the Atonement the resurrection could have no significance for us.

Could the apostle Paul of the Letters have behaved in the way as he does in Acts?

It is often argued that the Paul of the letters could never have done some of the things spoken of in Acts. Paul, it is said, was so firm in his belief concerning the freedom of the Christian from the Law, even for the Jewish Christian, that he could never 1). have agreed to the circumcision of Timothy (16.3) or 2). have agreed to subject himself to a vow in the Temple (21.20-26).

However, with regard to this it must be remembered that Paul had already passionately stated that he was willing, in order to convert Jews, to become as a Jew to them (1 Corinthians 9.20). This is a strong counter to the above argument. And this is especially so because his reason for circumcising Timothy, who was half Jewish by birth through his mother, was actually said to be in order to make him more effective in witnessing to the Jews in the area (16.3). Circumcising him was therefore a very different thing from circumcising the Gentile Titus at a time when circumcision was being required by the Judaisers as necessary for him in order to be a Christian, a thing Paul adamantly refused to allow because it would have surrendered his case. In view of Paul's statement about his willingness to become as a Jew for the sake of winning Jews it is impossible to argue that he would not have behaved in this way, and have allowed Timothy to do the same. Indeed for such a reason, if it had not been for the arguments of the Judaisers, he may well have been willing to circumcise Titus as well. His refusal was because Titus had become a test case, and therefore because his being circumcised would have yielded the case to the Judaisers and prevented the full truth of the Gospel from being apparent.

This is rather an example to us of how, while we must never do anything to compromise the truth, we must always be ready not to allow secondary matters to hinder the presentation of the Gospel.

With regard to the Vow in the Temple (21.20-26), the first question is as to whether it was a Nazirite vow? 21.20-26 does not in fact say that Paul made a full Nazirite vow, and thus we have no right to assume so. We are not told that Paul grew his hair long, nor that he shaved his head at that stage. The point was that he would purify himself and pay the expenses of the four men, giving them assistance while they completed their vows. The truth is that our knowledge of the system of vows in Judaism at that time is strictly limited. And in view of the complications of religious ritual and religious vows in the religion of Israel, about which we do not have full information, it is absolutely impossible without further evidence for us to know all the different situations with regard to vows, and the types of vow that a Jew could make. (Compare Leviticus 27). Thus we cannot suggest that Paul's participation did not follow the correct requirements, because we cannot know whether it did or not, and the only question needing to be dealt with is therefore whether Paul would ever, under any circumstances, assist in the fulfilment of a vow and pay the costs of the offerings for others who took such a vow?

In 18.18 we read of him that he had 'shorn his head in Cenchreae because he had a vow'. There is no reason for mentioning it there if it did not happen. Nor is there any explanation given for it. Thus Luke clearly seems to have seen it as nothing out of the ordinary. He clearly saw vow-making as something that Paul took part in and treated seriously, and was a part of the tradition.

When we consider that in 21.23 ff. he was personally being pressed to do what he did by James, the Lord's brother, who had sided with him in his contest with the Judaisers, and that he had said that he was willing to do anything reasonable to further the Gospel, there would seem no credible reason why he would not have done so. For his reason for doing so was to be because it had falsely been said that he forbade any Jewish Christian to continue to fulfil the Law or circumcise their children. As he had not forbidden it, and indeed would favour it where, as in the case of James, it helped him to make a good witness before Jews, such as in Jerusalem, there was no reason for him to refuse.

What he had taught was that it was allowable before God for Christians not to fulfil the full requirements of the ritual Law, (because they were seen as fulfilled in Christ), and he may well have been glad to put any misunderstanding right if it was causing offence. And if he thought at the same time that it would help his brethren in the Jewish church to survive in difficult times, it gives us even more reason for suggesting that he would be very willing to do so. After all he was simply being asked to take a minor part in a ritual that he had been through at least once before and probably also in his youth. If it would help to uphold the Jewish church in the Jerusalem community he may well even have felt obliged to do it, and at the same time have recognised that he could get some religious

benefit from such a dedication, as it would not be compromising his firmly stated beliefs which had been upheld by the Council.

We must remember that Jesus had always fulfilled the Jewish Law during His lifetime. Paul would therefore be following in His steps. And it would give Paul an opportunity of upholding the other four vow-makers, and of witnessing to Jews in the Temple. Even if he was not very happy about the situation, and there is no real reason for thinking this, he would have been in a very difficult position, for he knew that he partly owed it to James that his arguments against the need to circumcise Gentiles had won the day. His gratitude may thus have helped to sway his decision. His position had after all been made quite clear to, and by, the Council, who had openly confirmed it, so that he would not see himself as compromising on essentials. And as God used it to get him to Rome, and so that he was able to witness to kings and governors in the meantime, we could well argue that it was in fact God's intention for him as well (23.11).

Some have also argued that it would have been questionable, morally, if he could really have held his peace about his Christianity and have described himself, especially before a court of justice, simply as a Pharisee (23.6, compare 24.21; 26.5-8; 28.20), asserting that he was accused only on account of the doctrine of the resurrection of the dead. But Paul may well have seen Christianity, with its firm belief in eternal life and the resurrection of the dead, which were central to Pharisaism, as the true fulfilment of the Pharisaism that had once gripped him, and thus have seen himself as representing the true Pharisaic position, as one who had come to a position which was the fulfilment of Pharisaism. For the final aim of Pharisees was by all means to be faithful to God's covenant, and that was certainly Paul's aim, although now seen differently. It was not on the whole on basic doctrines, but in the detail, that he disagreed with the Pharisees. He was certainly far nearer to the Pharisees than the Sadducees. And we must remember that he had personally seen the finest side of Pharisaism in his connection with Gamaliel.

Furthermore Paul did see the church as the Israel of God (Galatians 6.16), and in Ephesians 2.11-22 made clear the acceptance of believing Gentiles into oneness with Jews in the covenant, and in Romans 11 stresses that Gentiles have been grafted in to the olive tree, while unbelieving Jews have been cut out of it. This being so there is no reason why he should not have argued for himself as being now a true Jew, a true Israelite and a true Pharisee.

It really is therefore impossible for us to know the nature of Paul's thinking on such a matter, or to reach a verdict about how he saw things. Consider how some Christian Jews today can proudly proclaim themselves as Jews, and would certainly be prepared to defend that claim, even in a court of law, and see themselves as the true Jews, and might well side with certain Jews on some

issues as in some ways one with them. Many a Pharisee probably did become a Christian and continue to see himself as a Pharisee, simply considering that he had found a better way to obtain what he as a Pharisee had been looking for. By still being a covenant fulfiller, and by receiving eternal life, which was the general aim of Pharisaism, he may well have seen himself as fulfilling the Pharisaic ideal in Christ (Who Himself was never criticised by the Pharisees for not on the whole following their customs).

Furthermore Paul may well, as he stood there and heard the accusations being levelled against him, especially if his view of the resurrection was part of what was being attacked, have felt at one with the Pharisees over the questions at issue, and have been quite happy to identify himself with them on these main points, because at least to that extent they agreed with each other, especially if he thought that by that tactic he might woo them to Christ. Thus it was not necessarily duplicity. He may well have seen himself as a genuine Pharisee just as he saw all Christians as genuine Israelites by adoption.

In all this then we see a man of great tact who, while he was firm for the truth when it was being questioned, was also willing to compromise where that truth was not at stake in order to woo men to following Christ.

The Speeches in Acts

The question of whether the speeches in Acts genuinely reflect what was said at the time has been hotly debated. Part of the difficulty is clearly that most of the speeches were mainly a précis of actual speeches which would no doubt have been a lot longer, something which can hardly be doubted. So we are not really asking whether we have here the exact words, but whether we have the correct sense and phraseology. Certainly reputable writers did seek to ensure that, when they wrote down what men had 'said', their words gave the true meaning of their utterances, as Thucydides strongly affirms. He says that he was, 'of course adhering as closely as possible to the general sense of what was actually said', even of speeches which he could not fully recall, and stresses that their content either came from his having heard them himself or from reliable sources. On the other hand he also spoke of making plain 'those subjective elements which cannot easily be displayed in an impartial narrative, but are indispensable to a proper understanding of events'. He also wanted what the speeches were intending to convey to be made clear. Polybius was actually critical of this and went further, for he insisted that what should be recorded was what was actually said. So it is wrong to assume that it was 'normal' in those days just to invent speeches, although no doubt some writers did do so, as some do today.

Thus we would expect a reliable author like Luke, where he had not heard the speech himself, to ensure from his sources what was actually said, and to ensure

that those sources would be people who had listened carefully with the intention of remembering, and were people who were used to remembering such things. And they would certainly be helped by the fact that the Biblical quotations used would be familiar to them. Furthermore, as they had no New Testament to consult for an understanding of their faith, and were used to memorising, they would be the more particular to remember words that came from a reliable source. Nor were they likely to forget them. For many of the listeners would treasure up the words that they had heard with a view to passing them on, and would have been careful to remember them correctly because they were Apostolic words, with the result that as they continually passed them on to one audience after another their words would take on a specific never to be forgotten form based on what was actually said, which would also become a treasured memory to others. Having nowhere else to turn for material they would preach what they had heard preached, and would be careful to remember it accurately so that they did not alter the inspired words of the original preacher. Indeed if they did alter the words there would be others who had also heard the original speech who would soon remind them accordingly. For, as Papias tells us, emphasising the importance laid on this by the early church, all would be eager to know what were the actual words of the Apostles. They did care about truth.

Analyses of the speeches have both recognised their different kinds, and to some extent their common approach, with differences seen as depending on the context. And this common approach would seem to be, not that of the writer, but of the early preachers themselves, for parallels to aspects of Acts speeches can be found both in the Gospels and in Pauline letters. Indeed it is now largely accepted that we actually know the main basis for most evangelistic speeches at that time, following a pattern which begins with a brief reference to past prophecy in order to indicate that the time promised by the prophets was at hand, followed by an explanation of the life and activities of Jesus, followed by a description of His death and resurrection duly explained, and all accompanied by explanatory texts from the Old Testament Scriptures, followed by the description of His exaltation, with an application to the need of the hearers at the end calling on them to repent and receive forgiveness. Where speeches differ from this it is mainly because of their special purpose or because of the particular audience that is in mind. We know therefore that we would expect Peter to have spoken as he is said to have done in Acts. Luke must therefore be acquitted from the charge of manufacturing speeches, although clearly he did have a hand in the selection of what part of the content he would use.

The pattern for such speeches was certainly not new. We can trace it backwards to the Gospels, and in Paul's letters. John the Baptist cited Old Testament prophecy, preached 'a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins' (Mark 1.4; Luke 3.3), declared, "Repent, for the Kingly Rule of Heaven is at hand"

(Matthew 3.2 compare 4.17), and in proclaiming the coming judgment, promised also the coming of the Holy Spirit (Matthew 3.11-12). When Jesus sent His disciples out to preach, no doubt having given them full instructions on what they were to say, He told them, ‘Preach, saying, “The Kingly Rule of Heaven is at hand” (Matthew 10.7;). Luke says they were to preach, “The Kingly Rule of God is come near to you” (Luke 10.9 compare 9.2). And in all cases they were to intimate that judgment awaited those who rejected their message (Matthew 10.14-15; Luke 9.5; 10.11-13). This is amplified in Mark 1.15 where the preaching of the good news of God was, “The time is fulfilled (spoken of by the prophets), and the Kingly Rule of God is at hand. Repent you and believe the good news”. So we already have a pattern of preaching with the central points emphasised that appear in Acts. Clearly Jesus would also have filled this out with references to the Scriptures and instructions on how to amplify this message. After all, the Apostles did not just go out repeating one sentence like parrots.

So the pattern He has given His disciples, and which they had preached on time and again, was:

- (1) Reference to the fulfilment of the time promised by the prophets.
- (2) The proclamation of the kingly rule of God as at hand or as having drawn near.
- (3) The call to repent and believe.
- (4) The promise of the forgiveness of sins,
- (5) The warning of imminent judgment to come.

Added by John the Baptiser were the call to be baptised and await the reception of the Holy Spirit. And we may see it as certain that the disciples would also make reference to Jesus and His life and teaching, which were the basis of the Kingly Rule of God.

When Jesus was preparing His disciples for their ministry after His resurrection He ‘opened their minds to understand the Scriptures’, that is, to ‘all things which were written in Moses and the prophets and the Psalms concerning Him’, and informed them, ‘Thus it is written that the Messiah should suffer, and rise again from the dead the third day, and that *repentance and remission of sins* should be preached in His name to all the nations’ (Luke 24.46-47).

In Matthew His commission was, “*All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth*, go you therefore and make disciples of all nations, *baptising them* into the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you” (Matthew 28.18-19).

We could now see the overall pattern of preaching taught them by Jesus as expanding to be as follows;

- (1) Reference to the fulfilment of the time promised by the prophets.
- (2) The proclamation of the kingly rule of God as at hand or as having drawn near.
- (3) Reference to His suffering and rising again as declared in the Scriptures.
- (4) The declaration that Jesus has openly been made Lord and Messiah.
- (5) The call to repent and believe.
- (6) The promise of the forgiveness of sins.
- (7) The call to be baptised in anticipation of the coming of the Holy Spirit on them.
- (8) The warning of imminent judgment to come.

Thus we should not be surprised to find that this was the pattern which Peter emphasised in his first preaching after the resurrection in Acts 2-4. It was in fact what he had been taught by Jesus Himself. In Acts 2-4 we have four speeches by Peter. The first (2.14-36, 38-39) was delivered by Peter to the crowds assembled on the Day of Pentecost, the second (3.12-26) was to the people after the healing of a lame man, the third and fourth (4.8-12; 5.29-32) were to the Sanhedrin after the arrest of the apostles, and all in general follow this pattern. The speech of Peter to Cornelius in 10.34-43 is similar to the earlier speeches, but it has some special features and suggests even more an Aramaic original.

These first speeches of Peter cover substantially the same ground as we have described above. The phraseology and order of presentation may vary slightly, but there is no essential difference between them. They supplement one another, and taken together afford a comprehensive view of Peter's approach which seems to have become the standard for early preaching on the basis of what Jesus had taught them. It was based on training given by Jesus when they went out preaching the Kingly Rule of God, but extended to take account of the crucifixion and resurrection, and the exaltation of Jesus. Peter was no longer a novice when it came to preaching, and now the Holy Spirit had come with power.

Consider the basis of the speeches in Acts:

- Firstly that the time is fulfilled, that is, that the age of fulfilment spoken of by the prophets has come, and that the Messianic age has dawned. "This is that which was spoken by the prophet" (Acts 2.16). "The things which God foreshowed by the mouth of all the prophets, that His Messiah should suffer, He thus fulfilled" (3.18). "All the prophets from Samuel and those who followed after, as many as have spoken, told of these days" (3.24).

And this tied in with Jewish teaching for it was a central feature of Rabbinic exegesis of the Old Testament that what the prophets predicted had reference to the "days of the Messiah." In other words they predicted the time of expectation when God, after long centuries of waiting, would visit His people with blessing and judgment, and bring to a climax His dealings with them.

- Secondly, that this has taken place through the ministry, death, and resurrection of Jesus, of which a brief account is given, with proof from the Scriptures that all took place through "the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God" (2.23).

(1) This could include, 1) His Davidic descent. "David, being a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him, that of the fruit of his loins, He would set one on his throne, foreseeing the resurrection of the Messiah ---," who is therefore proclaimed, by implication, to have been born "of the seed of David" (2.30-31; citing Psalm 131.11 compare Psalm 16.10. See Romans 1.3).

(2) His life and ministry. "Jesus of Nazareth, a man divinely accredited to you by mighty works and wonders and signs which God did by Him among you" (Acts 2.22). "Moses said, The Lord your God will raise up a prophet --- like me; him you must hear in all things that he may say to you" (Acts 3.22; regarded as fulfilled in the preaching and teaching of Jesus).

(3) His death. "Him being delivered up by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, you, by the hands of lawless men, did crucify and slay" (2.23). "His servant Jesus, Whom you caused to be arrested, and denied before the face of Pilate, when he had decided to release Him. And you denied the Holy and Righteous One, and asked for a murderer to be granted to you, and killed the Prince of Life" (3.13-14). "Jesus Christ of Nazareth Whom you crucified" (4.10).

(4) His resurrection. "Whom God raised up, having loosed the pangs of death, because it was not possible for Him to be held by it. For David says with reference to Him, --- 'You will not leave my soul in Hades, nor give Your Holy One to see corruption' " (2.24, 27-28). "Whom God raised from the dead, whereof we are witnesses" (3.15). "Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead" (4.10).

- Thirdly, by virtue of the resurrection, Jesus has been exalted at the right hand of God, as Lord and Messiah and head of the new Israel (receiving all authority in heaven and earth). "Being exalted at the right hand of God

--- God has made Him Lord and Messiah" (2.33, 36 compare Psalm 110.1). "The God of our fathers --- has glorified His Servant Jesus" (3.13). "He is the Stone which was rejected by you builders, which was made the head of the corner" (4.11, citing Psalm 118.22). We can compare with this, "Him did God exalt with His right hand, as Prince and Saviour" (5.31). In the words of Jesus in Matthew 28.19, all authority had been given to Him in heaven and on earth.

- Fourthly, the Holy Spirit in His people is the proof of Christ's present power and glory. "Being exalted at the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He has poured out this which you see and hear" (Acts 2.33). This is referred to earlier by citing Joel 2.28-32 in Acts 2.17-21. See also, "We are witnesses of these things, and so is the Holy Spirit which God has given to those who obey Him" (5.32). The promised baptism (drenching) with the Holy Spirit had come.
- Fifthly, the Messianic Age will shortly reach its consummation in the return of Christ, a consummation awaited from the beginning. "That He may send the Messiah appointed beforehand for you, Jesus, whom heaven must receive until the times of the restoration of all things, of which God spoke through the mouth of His prophets which have been since the world began" (3.21). This is in fact the only reference in Acts 2-4 which speaks of the second coming of Christ, but in Acts 10 it is seen as part of the apostolic preaching, "This is He who is ordained by God as Judge of living and dead" (10.42). This is the only explicit reference to Christ as Judge in these speeches (compare John 5.22, 27), but as we have seen it was certainly an assumption of the Apostolic ministry during the lifetime of Jesus.
- Sixthly, and finally, the preaching regularly closes with an appeal for repentance, an offer of forgiveness and of the Holy Spirit, and the promise of "salvation," that is, of "eternal life, the life of the age to come," to those who become Christ's and one with His people. "Repent and be baptised, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you and your children, and to all who are far off, as many as the Lord your God may call to Him" (Acts 2.38-39, referring to 2.21 (Joel 2. 32), Isaiah 57.19). "Repent therefore and turn again, that your sins may be blotted out ---You are the sons of the prophets and of the covenant which God made with your fathers, saying to Abraham, 'And in your seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed.' To you first, God, having raised up His Servant, sent Him to bless you by turning every one of you away from your sins " (Acts 3.19, 25-26, having in mind Genesis 12.3). "In none other is there salvation, for nor is there any other name under heaven given among men by which you must be saved" (Acts 4.12).

We can compare with this, " Him did God exalt at His right hand as Prince and Saviour, to give repentance to Israel, and remission of sins" (Acts 5.31); "To Him bear all the prophets witness, that through His name everyone who believes in Him will receive remission of sins" (Acts 10.43).

This then is what the author of Acts meant by "preaching the Kingly Rule of God." It is very significant that it follows the lines of the summary of the preaching of Jesus as given in Mark 1.14-15 : "Jesus came into Galilee preaching the Good News of God, and saying, 'The time is fulfilled (spoken of by the prophets), and the Kingly Rule of God has drawn near. Repent and believe the Gospel', the lines of the preaching of John the Baptist to whom Peter had been a disciple, and the lines Jesus Himself laid out in His resurrection appearances, which together covered everything that Peter said.

The first clause in Mark's description, "The time is fulfilled," is expanded in the reference to prophecy and its fulfilment in accordance with what Jesus had no doubt taught them while He was alive, and had certainly taught them after His resurrection. The second clause, "The Kingly Rule of God has drawn near," is expanded in the account of the ministry and death of Jesus, and His resurrection and exaltation as Lord and Messiah to receive all authority in heaven and earth, having suffered as the Messiah. The third clause, "Repent and believe the Gospel," reappears in the appeal for repentance and the offer of forgiveness with which Peter's sermons close. Even if we had not known what Peter preached we could have pieced it together from the Gospels.

That this pattern was acceptable to Paul comes out in the first four verses of Romans. There he describes the Gospel of God as being - promised beforehand by his prophets in the Holy Scriptures (verse 2), concerning His Son Jesus Christ our Lord (verse 3), Who was made of the seed of David according to the flesh (verse 3), and declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the Spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead. That this included the cross comes out in what follows (Romans 3.24-28) and is stressed in 1 Corinthians 1.18; 2.2; 15.3-4.

Parallels between Luke and Acts

There are some interesting parallels between Luke and Acts. In Luke the first part is in Aramaic Greek and the second part is in general Greek, and the same applies in Acts, although in different proportions. The general Greek section begins in Luke when Jesus goes out to preach, and in Acts it begins once the Gentile believers' freedom from the Law has been confirmed. In Luke 3 John the Baptist refers to his baptism in water as pointing to the Coming One Who will baptise in the Holy Spirit, while in Acts 1.5 Jesus refers back to this saying.

In Luke 4 Jesus goes forth full of the Holy Spirit, and commences preaching the Kingly rule of God, healing, casting out evil spirits, as do His Apostles, and in Acts 2 the Apostles are filled with the Holy Spirit and go forth in the same way, healing, casting out evil spirits and proclaiming the Kingly Rule of God. In Luke 4 Jesus is immediately challenged about His ministry and His behaviour is treated as blasphemous, and a similar result follows the going out of the Apostles and their disciples. So the Acts ministry parallels the ministry of Jesus in a number of ways. And that this is a continuation comes out in that Jesus is the Servant of God, 'His chosen', in Luke (Luke 2.32; 3.22; 9.35 RV/RSV; 22.37; 23.35), while in Acts the early church (as well as Jesus) is the Servant of God (Acts 13.47).

In Luke Jesus calls His Apostles in order to expand His ministry (Luke 6.23-19), and in Acts 1 the number of the Apostles is made up ready for the expansion of the ministry through the Holy Spirit. In Luke Jesus is transfigured before His three main disciples (Luke 9.29), while in Acts He appears in glorious light to Paul, something drawn attention to three times (Acts 9.3; 22.6; 26.13 with 1 Corinthians 15.8). In Luke Jesus is 'compelled' to take His journey to Jerusalem (Acts 9.51-53; 13.22; 17.11), while in Acts Paul is compelled to take his journey to Rome (Acts 21.32-27), both finally being held under restraint, something which finally results in the triumph of God. Luke finishes with Christ enthroned triumphantly in heaven with all authority in heaven and earth (Luke 24.51 compare Matthew 28.19), while Acts finishes with Paul firmly established in Rome proclaiming the Kingly Rule of God (Acts 28.30-31). In Luke Jesus follows His ministry to the Jews with an attempted ministry to the Samaritans (Luke 9.52; 17.16), and in Acts 8.5 onwards the ministry to the Jews is followed by one to the Samaritans. However, Luke gives no obvious examples of a ministry to the Gentiles, although it is latent in Luke 7.1-10; 8.26-39. In Luke there is early concentration on the work of the Spirit, followed by silence, and the same applies, although to a lesser extent, in Acts, although in Luke the reason is probably in order to draw the whole of his reader's attention to Jesus, whereas in Acts it is to draw attention to Paul's being constrained and not free. In Luke Jesus passes his final days before His exaltation under restraint. In Acts Paul is held under restraint before his being established in Rome.

The parallels are far from exact, but they may well be deliberate (had they been too exact we might have doubted them). This is, however, no stereotyped representation. Rather it illustrates on the whole that we His people are called to follow in His steps.

Is there a General Consensus about the Book?

We do not intend to go into detail on the many controversies which have been fought over the book, for most of them merely arise from the disparity between

the kinds of people who have studied the book. As we might expect of a book which is so important, (it is the only record of mid 1st century church history that we have), views about it are many and varied, and are the result of the thinking of atheists, deists, rationalists, and people of various other religions, to say nothing of wide varieties of 'Christians'. We must thus expect diversities of views. They approach the book with their own agenda, and then they regularly each interpret in the light of their own ideas. They have thus tended to see in it what struck them from their point of view, and their interpretations are thus regularly the result of the viewpoint of the writer rather than something that is demanded by the text of the book itself. Each sees what he looks for.

Had a consensus been reached we might have seen things differently. But the fact that there is no consensus, and that widely differing views are still held, confirms that the views are solely just that and are not fully evidenced by the facts. Had they been so a consensus would have been reached. The fact that scholars are no nearer to coming to a consensus about it now than they have ever been, in spite of the time spent studying the book, serves to confirm that there is in fact no straightforward answer to the questions that have been asked.

This wide diversity of opinions demonstrates, not the unreliability of the book, but the general uncertainty and unreliability of the theories that have been raised. No theory is acceptable to the majority. This should rather make us recognise that if we do wish to grasp the truth about the book we will do it best by giving consideration to the text itself rather than by following one or other of the theories, which have simply been shown to be what they are, unproveable theories dependent on viewpoint which can obtain no wide agreement.

What, however, has been good about the theories is that they have made us think more deeply about the text itself, and given us new lines along which to think. Indeed the book is considered so important that its language has been analysed in detail over and over again, and its sources have been discussed continually, with no agreement having been reached, but as a result its historical accuracy has been thoroughly questioned, carefully examined, and then reinstated by competent scholars.

No other books in the world have been subjected to such detailed examination as the books of the Bible. And yet with all this what in the end tend to be put aside are not the books themselves, which still continue to stand firm, but rather all the theories that have been invented about them. Even today, after two hundred years or more of careful scrutiny by some of the most brilliant minds in the world, they are still not fully understood, and there is no consensus of opinion about them. Some people once thought that they would reach such a consensus, but they have been proved wrong. In fact no real evidence has been produced showing them to be other than what they claim to be. They have never been

‘disproved’. Each simply has an opinion which disagrees with someone else’s opinion (confirming that neither can be demonstrated to be true).

Applying this to Acts we can safely say that all attempts to discredit it have failed. No critical position has been demonstrated to be certainly true, and for every scholar who holds one view, there are others who hold the opposite. There is some little agreement. All would agree that its first half is in some way affected by Aramaic Greek, and that its second half is of ‘purer’, Greek, but views about why and how much this is so still vary considerably and contradict each other. There is no consensus on why this is. All we can probably safely say is that it is not a virginal piece of literature but did have some sources, including Aramaic sources, which is both what we would have expected and what Luke stated from the very beginning to be so.

The one who is looking for contradictions and does not look below the surface will, of course, find them to his own satisfaction. That is inevitable with any piece of literature. But then he will find that other scholars of equal calibre do not consider that they are contradictions. To some extent each finds what he is looking for, which suggests that the book itself is not so amenable to our theories as we would like. And thus our best way of deciding the issue for ourselves is by taking into account the best of what has been said, and then looking at the book itself and coming to our own conclusion with regard to it, having especially a regard, on careful study, to its quality, and its moral and spiritual impact, and giving recognition to the fact that there are able scholars today who still do accept it as a true record of what did happen. There has not been sufficient evidence to convince them otherwise.

One thing certainly stands out, and that is that after over two centuries and more of detailed study by scholars of all backgrounds, no certain grounds have been discovered for rejecting its historical truth. Indeed the opposite is the case. The gradual accretion of knowledge has served more to demonstrate its overall accuracy than otherwise, and to give us confidence in the fact that it can be relied on. No one has been able to clearly demonstrate that for all practical purposes it is mainly fictitious or pure invention. The opposite is in fact the case. All such suggestions have arisen from the unwillingness to believe that God was really at work. In fact as far as it can be tested the opposite has been demonstrated to be the case. It has been shown to stand securely against the background of its day.

We must accept, of course, that its truth is declared from a Christian viewpoint. No one would doubt that this is the case. Nor as Christians would we want it any other way. We do not want just a potted history. We want to know positively from the inspired writer what the facts reveal about Jesus Christ and about the Christian message. And that was after all why Luke was writing a history. He

was presenting a case and seeking to get over more than just facts. He was, under the guidance of the same Holy Spirit of Whom he writes, selecting and interpreting those facts. The interpreting of facts is something all historians do. And Luke was both a historian and a theologian, which was a necessity for the kind of books he wrote. But that is a very different thing from saying that he invented the facts, which the evidence suggests that he did not do.

Each person necessarily approaches facts from the point of view of his own prejudices. The one who believes that miracles cannot happen will interpret accordingly, whatever the facts are. To such people, whatever the evidence may be, the assumption will always be that the miracle cannot have happened and that an alternative explanation must therefore be found. The one who does not believe in a God Who acts, will interpret accordingly. From their viewpoint nothing can be an act of God. No sceptic, even having been given all the facts, could possibly have written the book of Acts, or could even have appreciated the issues involved. But that does not mean that Luke was historically inaccurate, only that he presented the facts from the point of view of one who did believe in miracles because he had seen them happen, and did believe in a God Who acts. That does not mean that he distorted the facts, or simply accepted things through prejudice. What it did do was determine how he interpreted the facts that he discovered.

For Luke's aim was to get over Who Jesus is and what He had come to do, and how the message about him was spread abroad from Jerusalem to Rome. He makes no secret of it. He makes it absolutely clear from the beginning (1.8). But if we wish to treat him fairly we must also recognise that he actually claims that he does so after a careful researching of the facts. He claims quite strongly that for this reason he did research the facts carefully (see Luke 1.1-4). Unless we are going to say that he was just being dishonest, we must necessarily take this into account in studying the book. We may disagree with his interpretation, but in view of his general proven historical accuracy, we must be careful before we dismiss the facts that he states.

Of course he was influenced by the fact that he believed in a God Who acts, and believed in miracles. No one would deny that. But nor can we doubt that he also genuinely wanted to ensure that he only spoke what he knew to be the truth, and basically claimed, with regard to that, that he did not just invent things in order to get over his message. We may accept that his facts were right, or we may claim that they were wrong, but we have no genuine reason for doubting that he had looked into them very carefully and had concluded that they really were facts. Certainly his interpretation of them was Christian. And equally certainly a non-Christian Pharisee or Sadducee would each have interpreted the facts very differently, both from Luke and from each other. But the underlying facts stand

firm. All, for example, saw the miracles, (apparently no one claimed that they did not happen) but each interpreted them from his own viewpoint. Indeed in chapters 3 & 4 we have a clear example of how different people knew the facts and interpreted them in different ways. In those chapters all admitted the facts, but each interpreted them according to their own background beliefs. And Paul certainly interpreted the facts very differently after he had been converted from how he did prior to being converted.

Thus all we can ask of Luke is that he was careful about the facts, genuinely sought to obtain his information from eyewitnesses, and did not try to make everything fit in with his own presuppositions. And it is our view that he has demonstrated that he did accomplish all three of these aims.

Prophecy in the Acts of the Apostles

Prophecy and Evangelism in Acts

Introduction

Many wonderful deeds were done by the Apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ. We can read about some of those exploits in the four “Gospels,” and The Of The Apostles.” They went about healing the sick and casting out devils. Some even raised the dead. Their exploits were so great that, unto this day, people think of them as some kind of super-human creatures. But they were just men of like passions as we are (James 5:17).

There was no aura around those men, or anything else to suggest that they were any different from anyone else. The Apostle Paul stated plainly, “We also are men of like passions with you.” They were simply men who GOD was using at the time (Acts 14:15).

Actually, there is very little said in the “Gospels,” or the “Acts,” about the majority of the Twelve Apostles of Christ. The Gospels give us barely more than their names, and tell of their appointment to that venerable office. The writer of the book of “The Acts of the Apostles” also mentions some of them by their names, and then proceeds to tell us about only three of them.

We are told of the wonders performed by the Apostle Peter, and how he and John laid hands on some, and they were baptized with the Holy Ghost. We are also told of the martyrdom of James the brother of John. As Luke continued, he told us of the apostles Paul, Apollos, Barnabas and of James, the brother of our Lord Jesus Christ. A total of at least twenty men are called “Apostles” in the New Testament.

When most Christians hear the word apostle, they think “twelve,” only twelve. Or we get the generic explanation that anyone who is “sent” is an apostle. As a result, when at least eight other Apostles are named in the Bible, the truth of the words simply does not register. The one exception to this is the Apostle Paul. However, when Barnabas is called an apostle in the same sentence with Paul, it is usually not received in the conscious thought of the reader (Acts 14:14).

The apostleship of Paul is deftly explained by most Bible teachers by insulting The Twelve, whom they profess to esteem so highly. They argue that the Apostles made a mistake when they ordained Matthias. Supposedly they should have waited seven years or more for Paul to be converted. But what are we to do with the apostleship of Barnabas and seven or so others, including James, the Lord’s brother (Gal. 1:19).

Apostleship is a gift. It is not merely a number or an office. The gifts of Apostle and Prophet are given to whomever GOD decides to give them (1 Cor. 12:11), and He gives them according to the person’s ability (Matt. 25:15). That did not end when they finished writing the New Testament. In fact, Paul told the Church at Ephesus that those gifts were given, “*until we all come in the unity of the faith.*” Evidently, that has not happened yet.

Since the record tells about the exploits of only a few of the Apostles, we must conclude that GOD had something else in mind, other than the veneration of those great men. Neither was the record given for purely historical purposes. *It was for the veneration of the true author of the Holy Scriptures: The creator Himself*; showing that He, in His wisdom, had foretold of all those things from the beginning of the world. The prayer of Peter and John, with their “Company,” in Acts 4:24-28, illustrates this point well.

“They lifted up their voice to GOD with one accord, and said ‘Lord, thou art GOD, which hast made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and all that in them is: who by the mouth of thy servant David hast said, Why did the heathen rage, and the people imagine vain things? The kings of the earth stood up, and the rulers were gathered together against the LORD, and against his Christ.’ For of a truth against thy holy child Jesus, whom thou hast anointed, both Herod, and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles, and the people of Israel, were gathered together, for *to do whatsoever thy hand and thy counsel determined before to be done*” (Psalm 2).

Their persecution of Jesus Christ, the very Son of GOD, was a momentous historical event, but it was much more; both Jesus and His enemies were fulfilling prophecy.

Most Christians believe in salvation through the scriptures, but they so often miss the prophetic side of the Word of GOD. They view the Old Testament much as the Jews did during the ministry of our Lord. Paul, in describing those Jews, also described Gentile Christianity today, saying, “Even unto this day, when Moses is read, the veil is upon their heart” (2 Corinthians 3:13-15). We do not wish to miss anything God has given us, so let us begin to heed Jesus’ admonition, and “Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and *they are they which testify (prophecy) of [Him]*” (John 5:39).

The Bible does much more than show us the way of eternal life. In the Old Testament, God laid out for us the plan of GOD from the beginning to the end. The Old Testament is a history of sorts, but, according to Jesus that is not its stated purpose. It is an account of selected historical events involving the creation, and the first four thousand years of man’s time on earth. Each of those events was selected, and written, because it could be used to reveal something about the plan of GOD.

The record of the creation prophesies of the work which GOD planned to do during man’s first six thousand years on the Earth. For instance, on *the third day*, GOD caused life to spring forth upon the earth, and in *the third millennium*, GOD gave to Israel the living oracles. He said to Moses, “I have set before thee *this day life and good*, and death and evil” Deut. 30:15). Paul agreed, saying, “Death reigned from Adam to Moses” (Romans 5:14).

Notice, in Matthew 11:13, how the Son of GOD described the Old Testament, “*All the prophets and the law prophesied until John.*” The Old Testament describes itself in the same manner. Isaiah said, “Remember the former things of old: for I am GOD and there is none else; I am GOD, and there is none like me, *declaring the end from the beginning*, and from ancient times the things that are not yet done, saying, My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure” (Isaiah 46:9-10).

The main theme of the New Testament is to show us what Jesus and the Church did in fulfilling the Old Testament prophecies. For instance, in Acts 12:23, we are told about the death of Herod, *because his death fulfilled the prophecy* in Isa. 51:7-8. “Fear ye not the reproach of men, neither be ye afraid of their revilings, for the worm shall eat them.”

The central theme of those prophecies was the coming, and the work of the Son of GOD. He *came in “the volume of the book which was written of Him”* (Psalm 40:7; Hebrews 10:7). And He will come again, *as it is written*.

However, there is another, large volume of the book which is given to GOD’s Elect to fulfil, and, Peter said that *Jesus will stay in heaven until we have*

fulfilled it (Acts 3:20-21). “The Scriptures cannot be broken” (John 10:35). We believe in Jesus and His Apostles, *Let us also believe what they said*.

Peter wrote of witnessing the glory and majesty of Jesus at the transfiguration (2 Pet. 1:16-19). Then he compared that testimony to Old Testament prophecy, saying, “We have a *more sure* word of prophecy; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, *until the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts*” In effect he said, the reason that prophesy is more sure than their marvellous experience was that the prophets did not write *what they thought GOD meant* (private interpretation), but rather, they wrote exactly what He said.

Who is that day star? It cannot possibly be Jesus, because Jesus had long since risen in their hearts at the time Peter wrote about it, and He has now risen in our hearts also. Peter’s intent is clear in this passage. He is telling us to *watch prophecy so we will recognize “the man of GOD” when he comes on the scene to prepare for the arrival of our King*.

It is understandable that many preachers today do not use 2 Peter 1:19 much. The great “crusade” today is the advocacy of the doctrine of Korah, saying, “It is heresy to follow a man.” They remind me of the religious leaders in the days of Jesus. They knew that Messiah was coming, but they made a law that if anyone came professing to be the Messiah he must be killed (John 19:7).

Jesus said that *the sign to their generation* would be the sign of the prophet *Jonas*. Jesus became that sign, when He spent three days and three nights in hell, and “the earth with her bars” was around Him (Acts 2:27; Jonah 2:26). The same Jesus said that *Noah* would be *the sign for our generation*.

Who is that man “Noah” who will fulfil the prophecy in Heb. 11:7, and save the House of GOD “when the enemy shall come in like a flood” (Isaiah 59:19)? Paul said, “Noah, being warned of GOD, of things not seen as yet, prepared an ark to the saving of his house.” And in Heb. 11:7, 39-40, Paul showed clearly that this is a prophecy *which must be fulfilled* in the grace age.

“The day,” which Peter mentioned, is beginning to dawn. And “The Day Star,” *will* make the preparation for the arrival of our King. GOD’s Elect must quickly “awake out of sleep” (Eph. 5:14-16), and become well advised of the prophecies concerning the Man of GOD and his work of preparation for that great event (Col. 1:25).

You can challenge this truth, but GOD did not idly give us the allegory of Korah, the son of Kohath, and his fellow insurgents. They, and two hundred and

fifty of the princes of the assembly, with their families, died because they challenged this truth (Numbers chapters 16 and 17).

Not only so, but the Apostle Jude told us that it also happened to some rebellious ministers in the Church in his day. He said, “Likewise also these filthy dreamers – *despise dominion*, and *speak evil of dignities*. – These speak evil of those things which they know not. – Woe unto them! For *they have perished in the gainsaying of Core [Korah]*. These are spots in your feasts of charity, when they feast with you, feeding themselves without fear” (Jude 1:8-13).

Many of today’s ministers have fallen into the same trap, and cannot see what GOD is doing in the world today. Can we reject the words of Jude? If so, we also reject the Word of GOD. GOD does not change. He would never fail to keep His word. Jesus told us, in Matthew 24:45-47, that He would find His faithful and wise servant ruling over His household and giving them “meat in due season,” upon His return.

We need to take a fresh look at every doctrine which is taught in our churches. We must carefully analyze, and appropriately adjust our view of the Bible, so that we accurately reflect the truth of GOD in our teaching. We must have some men like those early Apostles, who used their gift from GOD to guide the people in pure doctrine (Acts 2:41-43). We need councils, such as they had in Acts 15, where “the Spirit of Counsel and Might” (Isa. 11:2) can work. O how we need that Spirit operating among us today!

We cannot afford to assume that our views are correct, even though they were handed down to us by sincere, godly leaders (Jer. 16:19). GOD may be ready to lead us into greater light than they had (Prov. 4:18). So let us search the Scriptures, “rightly dividing the Word of Truth” (2 Tim. 2:15).

Much of the discussion that takes place about prophecy amongst Christians today is focussed on the writings of Paul, where the character and function of prophecy in a congregational context is particularly in view. A wider perspective on prophecy in New Testament times, however, is supplied by the Acts of the Apostles. Peter’s use of Joel 2:28-32 in his sermon on the Day of Pentecost is clearly programmatic for understanding the significance of the gift of the Spirit in Luke’s theology. Acts 2 suggests that Joel is describing what it means to be Christian in terms of receiving ‘the Spirit of prophecy’.

There are seventeen references to the Spirit in the Third Gospel and about fifty in the Acts of the Apostles (more than in any other New Testament document), signalling the importance of this subject for Luke. Indeed, it may be argued that the theme of the operation of the Spirit of God is a major connecting thread between these two volumes. While many of Luke’s references to the work of the

Spirit are not controversial, considerable debate about the meaning and significance of some of his teaching continues to take place.

First and foremost, there is discussion about the nature and purpose of the Pentecostal gift in Acts. Why was the Spirit given to the earliest Christian communities in the way that Luke outlines? Does Acts present a view of the Spirit's work differing significantly from that of other New Testament books? In the context of investigating this issue, this paper will focus on what is meant by prophecy in Acts and explore the implications for Christian life and witness today. I will be particularly interested to explore the relationship between prophecy and preaching in Luke's presentation.

The Nature of Prophecy in Acts

The prophetic Scriptures and the apostolic preaching

The word 'prophecy' (προφητεία) does not occur in the Acts of the Apostles, though 'prophet' (προφήτης) appears thirty times and the verb 'prophesy' (προφητεύω) four times). By far the most common use of προφήτης is with reference to prophetic figures in the Old Testament such as Joel (2:16) David (2:30), Moses (3:22), or Isaiah (8:28; 28:25). God is said to have foretold certain events such as the suffering of his Christ 'through the mouth of all his prophets' (3:18). The words were theirs, but God was directing their utterances, revealing his mind and will to his people through them.

In particular, 'all the prophets from Samuel on, as many as have spoken, have foretold these days' (3:24), and all testify about Jesus, 'that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name' (10:43). Many and varied strands of Old Testament prophecy are regarded by the earliest Christian preachers as providing a united testimony to Christ and the situation of the early church. Their written words continue to give special insight into the person and work of the Lord Jesus and to challenge unbelievers to repentance and faith (3:22-3; 8:30-5; 13:32-41).

'The law and the prophets' (13:15; 24:14; 28:23; cf. 26:22 'the prophets and Moses'), or more narrowly 'the prophets' (26:22), are regularly used in the record of Acts by those engaged in apologetic and evangelistic work with Jews or Gentile God-fearers (e.g., 17:2-3; 28:23). The assumption is that those who accept the divine inspiration and unique authority of these writings will respond to their appeal. The prophetic Scriptures are also used by Christians to interpret their own situation and to solve dilemmas in their community life (e.g., 1:20-22; 4:25-30; 13:47; 15:15-18). Since the Holy Spirit was believed to have spoken in a unique and distinctive way through Moses and the prophets (1:16; 4:25; 28:25), the earliest Christian preachers expected that those who were 'sons of

the prophets' and heirs of the covenant (3:25) would recognise the fulfilment of God's promises in Jesus and turn to him.

Yet Stephen highlights the other side of the picture when he says:

You stiff-necked people, with uncircumcised hearts and ears! You are just like your fathers: You always resist the Holy Spirit! Was there ever a prophet your fathers did not persecute? They even killed those who predicted the coming of the Righteous One. And now you have betrayed and murdered him—you who have received the law that was put into effect through angels but have not obeyed it. (7:51-3)

Stephen's long speech accuses Israel of consistent rebellion against God, reaching its climax in the betrayal and murder of the one whom the prophets predicted. Such apostasy continued in the opposition to Stephen and others who testified to Jesus on the basis of the prophetic Scriptures. This whole pattern of obstinacy and disobedience is described as *a resistance to the Holy Spirit* (cf. Is 63:10), who spoke through the prophets and continues to speak through the witness of Christians. Those who act in this way show themselves to be spiritually uncircumcised (cf. Lv 26:41; Dt 10:16; Jer 4:4; 6:10), and therefore not true Israelites. They demonstrate the need for the sort of forgiveness and transformation of the 'heart' by God's Spirit mentioned in Jeremiah 31.31-34 and the related prophecy of Ezekiel 36:26-27.

Prophecy in the last days

Given this emphasis on the special role and authority of the Old Testament prophets in the plan of God for his people, it is highly significant that the Pentecost sermon of Peter proclaims the fulfilment of Joel 2:28-32. A distinctive characteristic of 'the last days' is the pouring out of God's Spirit 'on all flesh', so that 'your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams' (Acts 2:17). God promises through Joel, 'Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days,' and Peter repeats the words 'and they will prophesy' from the previous verse, to make the point absolutely clear (Acts 2:18). In other words, things will be revealed, which Israel's sons and daughters will then make known as the word of God. Peter's sermon is clearly programmatic for Acts, alerting us in advance to look for signs of the Spirit's presence and especially for prophetic activity, in the believing community.

Joel's prophecy also announces that this outpouring of the Spirit is an immediate prelude to the consummation of history:

I will show wonders in the heaven above and signs on the earth below, blood and fire and billows of smoke. The sun will be turned to darkness and the moon to blood, before the coming of the great and glorious day of the Lord. And everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. (Joel 2:30-32a, as cited in Acts 2:19-21)

Specific indications of prophetic ministry

Searching through Acts for signs of the Spirit's presence in the earliest communities, one is struck by the paucity of explicit references to prophecy as a gift or ministry operating amongst Christians. Leaving aside for a moment the question of whether the disciples were actually prophesying on the day of Pentecost, the first mention of Christian prophets is in 11:27-28. There we are told that, amongst some prophets who came down from Jerusalem to Antioch, one of them, named Agabus, stood up and 'through the Spirit predicted that a severe famine would spread over the entire Roman world'. The immediate result of this prophecy was that the Christians at Antioch were encouraged to give generously to the needs of their fellow believers in Judea. Perhaps the prophetic ministry of Agabus also included a specific exhortation to respond to his prediction in this way.

The presence of prophets and teachers in the church at Antioch is mentioned in Acts 13:1 and their names are given. No specific indication of the function of these prophets is supplied and it is not clear whether some of those mentioned were prophets and some teachers or whether all five exercised both ministries. Paul certainly combined the role of teacher and prophet, as Jesus did. It seems likely from the context that, while they were 'ministering to the Lord and fasting', the Holy Spirit spoke through one or more of the prophets saying, 'Release for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them (13:2). The fasting and praying that followed may have been to test the validity of this revelation or to intercede for those about to be sent off on this important mission.

Judas and Silas are mentioned in Acts 15:22 as leaders among the brothers in the Jerusalem church. Sent by the apostles and elders to the Gentile believers in Antioch, Syria and Cilicia, with the letter concerning the decision of the so-called Jerusalem Council, their task was to 'confirm by word of mouth' what was written (15:27). When Luke describes their ministry in Antioch he says that Judas and Silas, 'being themselves also prophets (καὶ αὐτοὶ προφητῆται ὄντες), exhorted (παρεκάλεσαν) the brothers with many words and strengthened them' (15:32). This expression appears to emphasise that their ministry on this occasion was distinctly *prophetic*, but not in the sense of giving new revelation. As they explained the ruling that the apostles and elders believed to have come from the Holy Spirit (15:28), and as they talked about its meaning and purpose,

God used them to encourage other believers. Perhaps they were chosen for this task ‘because they had already exercised an influential role in establishing (or proclaiming) the biblical rationale upon which the provisions of the Decree were justified.’ The parallel in our churches today is that biblical preaching, in one way or another, explains and urges a positive response to apostolic writings.

Believers more generally are said to have engaged in prophesying in Acts 19:6. Paul had discovered a group of about twelve people in Ephesus who appeared to be true ‘disciples’, but who had only received John’s baptism and were still looking forward to Messiah’s coming. Their situation is without parallel in the narrative of Acts. When Paul proclaimed Jesus as the Christ and they were baptised ‘into the name of the Lord Jesus’, Paul placed his hands on them, ‘the Holy Spirit came on them, and they spoke in tongues and prophesied’. The language here suggests that their experience was being compared, at least in some respects, with that of the original group of disciples on the day of Pentecost (2:4-11; cf. 11:15-17). Stott suggests that ‘they experienced a mini-Pentecost. Better, Pentecost caught up on them. Better still, they were caught up into it, as its promised blessings became theirs.’

Acts 21 contains several references to prophesying. First, the disciples at Tyre were urging Paul ‘through the Spirit’ not to go on to Jerusalem (21:4). But Paul had already been warned ‘in every city’ by the Holy Spirit that prison and hardships were facing him (20:23). Perhaps such warnings came through the prophetic ministry of other believers. Even though the urging in 21:4 is not called prophecy, there seems no better way to identify what was taking place. Nevertheless Paul, who had earlier described himself as journeying to Jerusalem ‘bound in/by the Spirit’ (δεδεημένος ἐγὼ τῷ πνεύματι, 20:22), would not be deflected from reaching his goal (cf. 20:24). The four unmarried daughters of Philip the evangelist are then described as those who regularly engaged in prophesying (προφητεύουσai, 21:9), though no details are given about what they said and did. Note that Paul gives guidelines about women praying and prophesying in Christian gatherings in 1 Corinthians 11:3-16.

Finally, Agabus the prophet from Judea reappears (21:10-11). Like many of the Old Testament prophets, he employs a symbolic action to reinforce the point of his prediction and speaks as the mouthpiece of God. Tying his own hands and feet with Paul’s belt, he declares: ‘The Holy Spirit says, “In this way the Jews of Jerusalem will bind the owner of this belt and will hand him over to the Gentiles”’. Once again, Paul ignores the warning and refuses to be dissuaded by the pleas of his friends (21:12-14). He is not rejecting a command of the Spirit. Like Jesus before him, he sets his face steadfastly to fulfil his God-given ministry, despite clear predictions of suffering and arrest.

In short then, explicit Christian prophecy in Acts is rarely mentioned. It involves prediction of future events, direction from God about the way in which the ministry of the gospel should proceed, interpretation of an apostolic letter and its significance, and exhortation or praise based on such insights.

Aune suggests that ‘the distinctive feature of prophetic speech was not so much its content or form, but its (direct) supernatural origin.’ But the prophetic ministry of Judas and Silas in Acts 15 does not easily fit into that framework. Luke certainly restricts the term or title ‘prophet’ to a select few, though prophetic-type activity is sometimes evidenced more widely in the early Christian communities. Thus, even though Ananias is not designated as a prophet, he receives a prophetic revelation concerning Paul and his future (9:10-16). Again, Peter displays the marks of a prophet, in his knowledge of people’s hearts (5:3; 8:20-23; cf. Lk 7:39), and in his experience of revelations in visions and dreams (10:10). Paul similarly receives prophetic-type communications from the Lord (16:9; 18:9; 22:17-21; 27:23-24) and combines the roles of apostle, teacher and prophet.

Having said this much, however, the question still remains as to how Luke envisaged Joel 2:28-32 being fulfilled for ‘all flesh’. Why is there not more widespread evidence of prophetic activity in Acts? In what sense is Joel’s prophecy descriptive of the experience of Christians in general?

The fulfilment of Joel’s prophecy - The Spirit as power for mission

Some interpreters of Luke-Acts have been content to argue that the ‘Spirit of prophecy’ given to the disciples is essentially designed to empower them for mission. This, for example, is the position of Lampe. Luke indicates that although the Spirit was fully present in Jesus from his conception (Lk 1:35), the endowment of the Spirit at his baptism enabled Jesus to fulfil the role of the eschatological prophet, to preach and to heal (Lk 3:21-22; 4:18-21; Acts 10:38). The disciples received a similar endowment from the risen Lord to enable them to continue his work. The Holy Spirit is clearly promised in Acts 1:8 to enable the disciples to fulfil the prophetic role of the Servant of the Lord, bringing unrepentant Israel back to God and taking the word of salvation ‘to the ends of the earth’ (cf. Is 49:6). ‘The mode of the Spirit’s bestowal (at Pentecost) corresponds to their missionary vocation. It is the Spirit of prophecy, foretold by Joel, and its coming symbolised by the gift of tongues for the inspired proclamation of the gospel to the different nations of the world.’

On this view, the Spirit in Acts may have little to do with ordinary Christian experience and is not depicted as the source of eschatological life and sonship, as in the Johannine or Pauline literature. Yet Lampe himself says, in connection with Acts 11:18 and the gift of the Spirit to the Gentiles:

Repentance is evidently regarded as the primary mode of the Spirit's operation in the converts, and it is natural to find that repentance, together with faith in Jesus as Messiah, is associated from the Day of Pentecost onwards with baptism in his name and reception of the gift of the Spirit.

If repentance is truly 'the primary mode of the Spirit's operation' in those who turn to Christ, the work of the Spirit in Acts should also be viewed in a regenerative role and not simply as the source of the gifts or as the dynamic for gospel witness. The programmatic promise of Acts 2:38-39 certainly links the promise of the Spirit with conversion and initiation:

Repent and be baptised, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off—for all whom the Lord our God will call.

The immediate context suggests that the Spirit had a central role in forming and maintaining the Messianic community (2:41-47), creating that unique fellowship of prayer, praise and generosity, which was based on their devotion to the apostolic teaching. The role of the Spirit is so significant in the life of this community that when the deception of Ananias is uncovered he is accused of having lied to the Holy Spirit (5:3).

Again, the view that the Spirit was given to gift people in a particular way (tongues, prophecy or preaching) does not take sufficient account of the note of universality sounded in Acts 2:39. The promise of the Spirit is 'for all whom the Lord our God will call': but did all the early Christians receive the Spirit of prophecy in the same way and engage in missionary activity?

The Spirit as the initiator of the new age

Other writers have proposed that the Spirit received by the disciples after Pentecost is essentially the same Spirit (functionally) that was on Jesus and that the Spirit in some sense mediated the religious and ethical life of Jesus. This, for example, is the position of Dunn. He argues that Jesus was not merely empowered for service at Jordan: his baptism in the Spirit initiated the Endtime and initiated Jesus into it. As Jesus himself entered into the new age, he was also equipped for life and service in that age:

The descent of the Spirit on Jesus effects not so much a change in Jesus, his person or his status, as the beginning of a new stage in salvation-history. The thought is not so much of Jesus becoming what he was not before, but of Jesus entering where he was not before—a new epoch in God's plan of redemption—and thus, by virtue of his unique personality, assuming a role which was not his

before because it could not be his by reason of the καιρός [time] being yet unfulfilled.

According to Dunn, until Pentecost, only Jesus had experienced the life and sonship of the new age and only in him was the kingdom present. Jesus' baptism in the Spirit is typical of all later Spirit-baptisms, by which God brings each to follow in Jesus' footsteps. Consequently, Dunn attempts to show that all the occasions of receiving the Spirit in Luke-Acts are concerned with conversion-initiation into the new age. The Spirit is primarily God's response to authentic faith and only secondarily connected with water baptism, when baptism expresses such faith.

Dunn rightly seeks to link the gift of the Spirit in Acts with initiation into the blessings of the End-time, but distorts the evidence at times to fit his case. Thus, he proposes that the disciples of Jesus attained authentic faith only at Pentecost.

But this is hardly consistent with the picture of their response to Jesus at the end of the Third Gospel, where we are told that they 'worshipped him' (προσκυνήσατε αὐτόν, Lk 24:52). Luke appears to have reserved this description of their response to Jesus for the climactic moment of the Ascension, to indicate that this was at last the real recognition of his identity by the disciples. Moreover, at the beginning of Acts, before Pentecost, the disciples acknowledge the divinity of the risen Jesus by praying to him as Lord (Acts 1:24-25). Dunn makes a distinction between the experience of the disciples before and after Pentecost that is too abrupt and artificial.

When Peter compares the experience of Cornelius and his household with that of the disciples in the upper room, saying 'God gave the same gift to them as he gave to us when we believed in the Lord Jesus Christ' (Acts 11:17, NRSV), Dunn argues that 'so far as Peter was concerned, their belief in him and commitment to him as Lord and Christ did not begin until Pentecost.' The participle in the expression ἡμῖν πιστεύασιν need not be understood in a strictly temporal sense but may be taken circumstantially, meaning 'to us having believed' (NIV, 'to us who believed'). It is also possible that the participle could be taken with the pronoun αὐτοῖς ('them'), giving the sense, 'God gave to them when they believed in the Lord Jesus Christ the same gift as he gave to us'. At all events, this verse must be read in the light of Luke's presentation of the developing faith of the disciples. It would be foolish to minimise the significance of Pentecost for the disciples and to suggest that there is little or no difference in the situation of believers before and after that event. However, Dunn plays down every suggestion given by Luke in his first volume that the disciples were able to experience in advance, during the course of Jesus' earthly ministry, some of the blessings of the age of salvation and of the new covenant (e.g., the forgiveness of sins through Jesus, the certainty of having their names

‘written in heaven’, a growing awareness of the significance of Jesus and of their own identity as the community of the Messiah).

Dunn further distorts the evidence when he argues that the Samaritans did not receive the Spirit at their baptism because their faith was imperfect, and that Peter and John were sent from Jerusalem to Samaria ‘to remedy a situation which had gone seriously wrong somewhere’. This ignores the claim of the text that they went because they heard that ‘Samaria had accepted the word of God’ (Acts 8:14). It was only when they arrived that they saw the need to pray for the Samaritans to receive the Holy Spirit. The ‘delay’ in the giving of the Spirit in this case must be attributed to God’s sovereign will and purpose and be related to the outworking of Jesus’ promise in Acts 1:8. The gift of the Spirit in this particular situation was withheld by God apparently to ‘draw the connection between Samaritans and the Jerusalem church through the apostles, Peter and John’. Given the division and animosity between these two communities that had existed over many centuries this act of God was surely designed to secure mutual acceptance and unity where racial and religious prejudice might have naturally hindered true fellowship in Christ. This certainly appears to be the motif in Peter’s report of the testimony of the Spirit to the conversion of the Gentiles to the Jerusalem church in Acts 11:15-18.

The Spirit of prophecy as the organ of communication between God and his people

Turner attempts a mediating position between the two views outlined above. The Pentecostal gift was not simply the beginning of the disciples’ experience of the New Age, and neither was it simply an empowering for service for those already initiated into that age. He rightly argues that in Luke’s Gospel the disciples had recognised, enjoyed and preached the in-breaking kingdom of God in the ministry of Jesus. They experienced God’s rule in their discipleship to Jesus and under the influence of the Spirit working through him. But his death and then his ascension posed the problem of how they would continue to experience the powers of the new age shaping their existence. John 14-16 presents the Spirit as their new Paraclete, whose role is to ‘bring them the presence of the Father and of the glorified Son’ (14:23). In similar vein, Acts indicates that the answer to their needs was the gift of the Spirit at Pentecost, viewed as the Spirit promised by Joel (Acts 2:17-39).

Peter’s sermon in Acts 2 is clearly foundational for understanding Luke’s theology of the Spirit. The tongues phenomenon in this unique context was a matter of ‘declaring the wonders of God’ in various forms of foreign but intelligible speech (2:6-11). This was not the sort of glossolalia evidenced in 1 Corinthians 14, nor was it strictly a form of evangelism but an outburst of ecstatic praise. Peter interprets this as a fulfilment of what Joel says regarding

prophecy (Acts 2:14-21). Joel 2:28-32 predicted that the Spirit of prophecy given to particular men and women in Old Testament times, to enable them to bring God's will and wisdom to the people, would be experienced by 'all flesh' in the last days. The words 'and they shall prophesy', which are found twice in Acts 2:17-18, make it quite clear that this will be the essential characteristic of the outpouring of the Spirit in the Endtime. However, it is important to investigate more carefully what is meant by this promise of the Spirit.

Prophesying is not simply to be identified with preaching or with prediction, since the Spirit of prophecy in Israel was more fundamentally the organ of communication between God and his people. A whole range of charismata derived from the Spirit of prophecy, including dreams, visions, tongues, and words that formed the basis of prophetic utterance and preaching. All of these things belong to the category of what Turner calls 'prophetism'. At one level, Joel's emphasis on seeing visions and dreaming dreams, was a way of pointing to the fulfilment of what Jeremiah 31:31-4 anticipated. The time was coming when God would enable all his people ('from the least of them to the greatest') to know him as Moses and the prophets knew him. There would be a 'democratisation' of access to God, making it possible for all to call on the Lord for salvation and to enjoy his deliverance (cf. Joel 2:32, cited in Acts 2:21). So the Spirit has a soteriological role (10:44-47; 11:15-17).

At another level, the Spirit would enable believers to understand the significance of what God was doing in their lives and to make it plain to others. Seeing visions and dreaming dreams refers to the *reception* of that new knowledge of God and prophesying refers to the *communication* of what is received. So the Spirit has a role in edifying the church (9:31), and making evangelism possible by ordinary believers (8:4-8; 11:19-21).

Peter challenged his listeners on the day of Pentecost to experience the fulfilment of Joel's prophecy by believing the gospel and recognising the Jesus whom they crucified as 'both Lord and Christ' (Acts 2:36). They could save themselves from that 'corrupt generation' by repenting and being baptised in the name of Jesus Christ (vv. 38-40). Only in this way could they receive the promised forgiveness of sins and the gift of the Holy Spirit. Prophesying, in its various manifestations, would then be the means of giving expression to that new knowledge of God made possible through the Spirit.

It was exactly this promise of the Spirit that the Judaism of Jesus' day most widely expected to be fulfilled 'in the last days'. What would have been really surprising was Peter's assertion that the glorified Jesus was the source of this gift (Acts 2:33). Luke's perspective in the rest of Acts is that Jesus continues to exercise his lordship in and through the disciples 'through the Spirit of prophecy acting as the organ of communication between the Father and Jesus in the

heavenlies, and the disciples on earth.’ This last statement is somewhat speculative in its claim that the Spirit is the organ of communication between the Father and Jesus in the heavenlies. But it is certainly true that Acts presents the risen Lord communicating with his disciples in various ways that fulfil the prophecy of Joel. There are crucial theological visions (10:10-16), or visions related to the progress of the gospel (16:9-10; 18:9-11), directions in words without vision (8:29; 10:19; 13:2), and obvious manifestations of Spirit-given wisdom and discernment (5:3; 6:10).

Turner argues that this last phenomenon is closely associated with, and can result in power in preaching, as especially manifested in the case of Stephen (7:55-56). Obviously the sermons in Acts are a major source of the book’s theology. Power in preaching is a major emphasis in Acts, but is not to be confused with the essence of the Pentecost gift. According to Turner it is ‘merely one aspect of the activity of the Spirit as the christocentric Spirit of prophecy’.

Turner’s link between Joel’s prophecy and Jeremiah 31:31-34 is helpful as a background for the interpretation of Acts 2:38-39. The gift of the Spirit is promised to all whom the Lord our God will call to himself, who respond to the preaching of the gospel by repenting and being baptised in the name of Jesus Christ. The purpose of such baptism is to receive the New Covenant promise of the forgiveness of sins (v. 38, εἰς ἄφεσιν τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν) and the gift of the Holy Spirit (καὶ λήμψεσθε τὴν δωρεὰν τοῦ ἁγίου πνεύματος). This passage illustrates the normal expectation of the apostles for those who responded appropriately to the preaching of the gospel. It is as if the two elements of Jeremiah 31:34 are being offered together: a definitive forgiveness of sins and a profound transformation of Israel’s relationship with God, expressed in terms of the gift of his Spirit (cf. Ezk 36:26-7). Peter indicates that this new knowledge of God is to be mediated by the Spirit, whose powerful presence was illustrated on the Day of Pentecost in the disciples’ ‘declaring the wonders of God’ in other languages (2:11) and in Peter’s proclamation of the gospel.

Contrary to some Pentecostal and charismatic teaching, the advent of the Spirit of prophecy in Acts does not create a special class of spiritually gifted or empowered Christians over against others:

Rather, it brings to each the means of receiving not only ‘communion with the Lord’ viewed generally, but also the same concretely specified in charismata of heavenly wisdom and knowledge. These may inform the teacher guide the missionary, lead in individual decisions, give diagnosis to the pastor, ‘irresistible wisdom’ and power to the preacher, or be related as prophecy to the congregation or other individuals. The ‘power’ received by the apostles (cf. Acts 1:8) was not something in addition to Joel’s promised gift, but precisely an

intense experience of some of the charismata which are part and parcel of the operation of the Spirit as Joel's promised Spirit of prophecy.

The particular displays of charismata at Pentecost, and when the Spirit was received by the Samaritans (Acts 8) and the Gentiles (Acts 10), were 'appropriate divine attestations of the beginning of the whole post-ascension Christian work of the Spirit.' Apart from 19:6, the rest of Acts does not indicate that the reception of the Spirit was universally attested by such immediate manifestations of charismata. These events were critical moments in the unfolding of God's saving purposes, as predicted and outlined in Acts 1:8, when new people-groups were reached with the gospel. They are not to be taken as paradigms for individual experience. Yet the prophesying anticipated by Joel was meant to be experienced and shared by all believers in some measure. For that reason, we are bound to discern this phenomenon in a variety of ministries not specifically described in Acts as prophesying. We are also bound to reflect on ways in which prophesying continues to be manifested in the life of the church throughout the ages.

Teaching and prophesying in the church today

The relationship between prophecy and preaching was briefly touched upon in the consideration of Turner's arguments. However, it is important to explore this issue more fully because it continues to be hotly debated. Best notes that prophesying in the Old Testament related to past, present and future:

the prophet takes up the old revelation and applies it to the present situation; he gives under God something new; and by the incompleteness of his own revelation he implies that God has yet further "words" to speak.

However, since the redemptive action of God to which the Old Testament prophets pointed has now taken place in Jesus Christ, 'we do not require further or supplementary revelations'. The New Testament preacher can only be described as a prophet in an attenuated sense. The preacher

will not expect the Spirit to lead him to utter new truths, nor can he bear witness to the incompleteness of the truth as already revealed; the Spirit can only lead him to the truth which is Jesus Christ; but he may still take up the Word of Scripture and apply it to his own day, finding perhaps new depths in it, but never anything uniquely new.

Best rightly points to the special prophetic status of the New Testament writers and compares them with the canonical or writing prophets of the Old Testament. This is signalled in various ways elsewhere in the New Testament. For example, Paul insists on the foundational and abiding authority of the message he received

from the Lord (Gal 1:6-16), his distinctive role in explaining and making known ‘the mystery of Christ’ (Eph 3:1-9), and his status as one who can write ‘a command of the Lord’ (1 Cor 14:37). Prophets such as Agabus stand more in the tradition of non-canonical prophets in the Old Testament, but are never regarded as being false prophets, in opposition to apostolic teaching. Best rightly opposes a simplistic identification of the prophet and the teacher, but does not explain as adequately as Max Turner how the two roles or functions might be shared by the one person.

Grudem has similarly argued that the apostles and other New Testament writers truly inherit the mantle of the Old Testament canonical prophets, since they claim absolute divine authority for their words and call upon believers to acknowledge that authority.

By contrast, the prophetic ministry given to certain members of the Corinthian church required assessment and evaluation, which implied the possibility of challenging and even rejecting such contributions (1 Cor 14:29; cf. 1 Thess 5:21-2). This suggests that their prophecy did not carry the weight of being actual ‘words from the Lord’ in the Old Testament prophetic sense, yet it was distinguishable from other human words in that it was the result of a revelation (ἀποκαλύψις, cf. 1 Cor 14:30), a prompting of the Spirit of God.

The apostles functioned as foundational prophets, transmitting the revelation that was applicable to all the churches, providing the touchstone for assessing all other ministries, and subsequently forming the basis of New Testament Scripture. The revelation given to the Corinthian prophets was of a different character.

The argument that inspired preaching, exegesis or teaching are actually (wholly or in part) what the New Testament means by prophecy has been asserted by writers such as David Hill and Earle Ellis. However, since early Christian writers regularly distinguished the charismata of teaching and prophecy (e.g., Acts 13:1; Rom 12:6-7; 1 Cor 12:28-9; Eph 4:11), it seems likely that the old and widespread difference between these functions in Judaism and in the Greco-Roman world was being maintained. In Acts, prophesying is a ministry shared by all believers in different ways, though it is particularly manifested in those designated as prophets, either in prediction or in encouragement. Teaching was clearly an apostolic function in the first place (2:42), though it was soon carried out by others (11:26; 13:1; 15:1; 18:25), both formally and informally. Prophecy and teaching appear to overlap in the ministry of preaching.

Prophetic Preaching

Someone among the scholars defines *preaching* as ‘public announcement and explanation of religious ideas or principles, accompanied with exhortation to acceptance and compliance’, distinguishing this from *purely oracular speech*, which he defines as ‘specific verbal messages believed to originate with God and simply to be “communicated” through an inspired human intermediary.’ The Spirit is viewed as the power behind the apostolic preaching in Acts, but authoritative preaching is the effect of a number of separate activities of the Spirit.

The sequence of events in Acts 2 suggests that Peter is acting as a prophet when he proclaims the gospel so powerfully. He has unexpected insight into the Scriptures for an ‘unschooled’ Jewish man (cf. 4:13), though there is no indication of a direct or immediate revelation from the Lord. His preaching, like the speaking in other languages, is a bold proclamation of God’s deeds, made possible by the coming of the Holy Spirit (2:11; cf. 4:33). It doubtless also reflects the post-resurrection teaching of Jesus (Lk 24:44-49; Acts 1:1-8) and the deeper understanding of God’s will revealed to Peter then.

Like this one, the sermons recorded later in Acts involve teaching, but they are prophetic in the sense that they convey profound Scriptural insights, exhort the listeners with God-given discernment and authority, and bring about remarkable conversions. Luke constantly points to the power of the apostolic preaching to turn even hardened opponents to Christ. Such preaching is at the heart of God’s redemptive purpose for the nations. Acts 20:18-35 is the only model of pastoral preaching offered by Luke (though see 14:22). This too has a remarkable impact on those who hear it (vv. 36-38).

Acts is really the story of how ‘the word of God’ continued to increase and spread (e.g., 6:7; 12:24; 13:48-9; 15:35), as it was preached and received in the power of the Holy Spirit. The message about Jesus is given the same status as the prophetic Scriptures upon which it is based. It is ‘the word of the Lord’, the revelation of God for ‘the last days’, which any believer can take and share (8:4; 11:19-21). The triumphant conclusion to the story of Paul’s trials is the statement that ‘boldly and without hindrance he preached the kingdom of God and taught about the Lord Jesus Christ’ (28:31). The word of God is not fettered, by persecution or imprisonment! One of Luke’s aims was surely to point to the ongoing need for such teaching and preaching, by those empowered by the same Spirit of God.

If wisdom, insight and power in evangelising and pastoral preaching are allowed to come under the general title of ‘prophetism’ (prophecy and related phenomena), the import of Joel’s prophecy for that vital aspect of Christian

ministry becomes clear. ‘Revelation’ may be communicated to the church, not in the sense of a totally new message, but as a deeper understanding of God’s character and purpose (cf. Eph 1:17 [ἀποκαλύψεως]; Phil 3:15 [ἀποκαλύψει]). The Spirit gives wisdom for debates with unbelievers (cf. Stephen in 6:3, 5, 10, fulfilling Lk 21:15), and the interpretation and application of Scripture in preaching (7:1-53). Assurance and boldness may be given by the Spirit for specific occasions, together with the discernment necessary to proclaim a relevant message (e.g. 4:8-12, 31; 7:54-60).

Without confusing preaching and prophecy in the strict sense, it is clear from Acts that there can be a prophetic dimension to authoritative and effective Christian preaching. Turner’s work has shown that, in this emphasis on the Spirit as ‘the (direct) power of charismatic expository address’, Luke differs significantly from Jewish literature of the time. His understanding appears to have been influenced by Christian teaching and his experience of the outworking of Joel’s prediction in the life and witness of the earliest churches.

Conclusions

‘The Spirit of prophecy’ that has been poured out on all who turn to the ascended Lord Jesus may be manifested in the following ways:

1. *Inspired praise* – expressed in testimony to Christ and to ‘the wonders of God’, spoken or sung (good Christian songs must surely convey and encourage this in their wording);
2. *Convincing proclamation* – applying the Scriptures to the person and work of Christ in ways that move people to repentance and faith and grow the church numerically;
3. *Discerning debate* – arguing for the truth of the gospel with a wisdom given by the Spirit that opponents cannot resist;
4. *Strengthening exhortation* - encouragement for believers that enables them to stand firm and persevere, thus maturing the church.

These ministries of the Spirit may operate in a range of contexts through believers with different gifts and opportunities. They may also combine in the ministry of what is commonly called preaching, providing a prophetic dimension to the teaching of the Scriptures and the proclamation of the gospel.

Finally, the Holy Bible provides a spiritual and historical accounting of God’s plan for forgiveness and reconciliation of mankind to Himself. The main thrust of Bible prophecy points to *Jesus Christ, the Messiah*. He is the One who is the Light of the world. Only through Him is forgiveness and reconciliation possible. There is no other name under heaven given by which we must be saved (Acts 4:12). The prophets ministered to Israel during times of disobedience and

obedience, and prophesied the first and second coming of *Christ* as the One who would fulfil God's ultimate plan of redemption. God is just in judgment and righteousness. Bible prophecy serves to warn and judge in times of disobedience, and to deliver and bless in times of repentance.

God chose Israel as His people from whom the *Saviour* would come to fulfill His ultimate plan of redemption. In the Old Testament, the prophets pointed to the two advents of *Christ*. While Israel is the primary focus of God's prophetic message, the Gentile nations are also included as they are an integral part of God's plan. The New Testament is witness to the first advent of *Christ* and prophetic to His second coming, which will occur at the end of our present age. At *Christ's* first coming, He became the final sacrifice and atonement for the sins of the world. God's gift of salvation became available to all who would receive *Christ* as their personal *Saviour*. The nation of Israel rejected *Jesus* as the *Messiah* while Gentile nations embraced Him. Since the crucifixion and resurrection of *Christ*, mankind has been living in the age of grace where salvation is available to all, both Jew and Gentile. In the Book of Revelation, *Christ* reveals to the apostle John the end time events in which He will bring Israel to repentance and judge all nations. We are experiencing some of those events today. The age of grace will soon end at the rapture of the church, which is the body of true believers. God will then judge the nations during the seven-year tribulation for their rejection of *Christ*. The tribulation period will culminate at the battle of Armageddon when *Christ* comes the second time to redeem Israel and execute final judgment on the Gentile nations. This will be followed by 1,000 years of righteousness, peace and prosperity as *Christ* rules the world from Jerusalem on the throne of David.

| FOUR LISTS OF APOSTLES OF CHRIST in the order listed by the writers | | | | |
|--|----------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| Matthew 10:2-4 | | Mark 3:16-19 | Luke 6:12-19 | Acts 1:13 |
| Simon | brothers | Simon | Simon | Peter |
| Andrew | | James | Andrew | James |
| James | brothers | John | James | John |
| John | | Andrew | John | Andrew |
| Philip | | Philip | Philip | Philip |
| Bartholomew | | Bartholomew | Bartholomew | Thomas |
| Thomas | | Matthew | Matthew | Bartholomew |
| Matthew | | Thomas | Thomas | Matthew |
| James son of Alphaeus | | James son of Alphaeus | James son of Alphaeus | James son of Alphaeus |
| Thaddaeus | | Thaddaeus | Simon the Zealot | Simon the Zealot |
| Simon the Cananaean | | Simon the Cananaean | Judas, son of James | Judas, son of James |
| Judas Iscariot | | Judas Iscariot | Judas Iscariot | |

Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles

By Arno C. Gaebelein

Introduction

The book known by the name “The Acts of the Apostles” (The oldest manuscript, the Sinaiticus, dating from the 4th century, given the title simply as “The Acts,” which is no doubt the better name for the book follows the four Gospel records. This is its proper place. The books of the New Testament have been correctly divided into five sections, corresponding to the first five books, with which the Bible begins, that is the Pentateuch. The four Gospels are the Genesis of the New Testament. Here we have the great beginning, the foundation upon which the subsequently revealed Christian doctrines rest. The Book of Acts is the Exodus; God leads out from bondage a heavenly people and sets them free. It is the great historical book of the New Testament given by inspiration, the beginning of the church on earth. The Pauline Epistles are the Leviticus portion. Holiness unto the Lord, the believer’s separation and standing in Christ; what the believer has and is in Christ, by whose blood redemption has been purchased, are the core truths of these Epistles. The Epistles of Peter, James, John and Jude, known by the name of the Catholic Epistles, are for the wilderness journey of God’s people, telling us of trials and suffering; these correspond to the Book of Numbers. The Book of Revelation in which God’s ways are rehearsed, and, so to speak, a review is given of the entire prophetic Word concerning the Jews, the Gentiles and the Church of God has therefore the same character as Deuteronomy.

By Whom was this Book Written

There is no doubt that the writer of the third Gospel record is the one whom the Holy Spirit selected to write this account of the establishment of the Church on earth and the events connected with it. This becomes clear if we read the beginning of that Gospel and compare it with the beginning of Acts. The writer in the third Gospel says: "It seemed good to me also, having had perfect understanding of all things from the first, to write unto thee in order, most excellent Theophilus, that thou mightest know the certainty of those things, wherein thou hast been instructed" (Luke 1:3-4). The Acts of the Apostles begin: "The former treatise have I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began both to do and teach." The former treatise known to Theophilus is the third Gospel, called the Gospel of Luke. The writer of that Gospel must therefore be the penman of the Book of Acts. Though we do not find Luke's name mentioned in the Gospel, nor in the second Book, he was entrusted to write by inspiration, there is no doubt that he wrote them both. We find his name mentioned a number of times in the Epistles, and these references give us the only reliable information we have. In Colossians 4:14 we read of him as "the beloved physician." In the Epistle of Philemon he is called a fellow laborer of the Apostle Paul, and from the last Epistle the great Apostle wrote, the second Epistle to Timothy, we learn that Luke was in Rome with Paul and was faithful to him, while others had forsaken the prisoner of the Lord. From Colossians 4:1-18 we also may gather that he was not a Jew, but a Gentile, for with the eleventh verse Paul had mentioned those of the circumcision. Epaphras was one of the Colossians, a Gentile, and then follow the names of Luke and Demas, both of them undoubtedly Gentiles. The reason that the Holy Spirit selected a Gentile to write the Gospel which pictures our Lord as the Man and the Saviour and the Book of Acts, is as obvious as it is interesting. Israel had rejected God's gift, and the glad news of salvation was now to go to the Gentiles. The Gospel of Luke addressed by a Gentile to a Gentile (Theophilus) is the Gospel for the Gentiles, and Luke the Gentile was chosen to give the history of the Gospel going forth from Jerusalem to the Gentiles.

Internal Evidences

There are numerous internal evidences which show likewise that the writer of the third Gospel is the instrument through whom the Book of Acts was given. For instance, there are about fifty peculiar phrases and words in both books which are rarely found elsewhere: they prove the same author.

Then we learn from the Book of Acts that Luke was an eyewitness of some of the events recorded by him in that book. He joined the Apostle during his second missionary journey to Troas (Acts 16:10). This evidence is found in the little word "we." The writer was now in company of the Apostle, whose fellow

laborer he was. He went with Paul to Macedonia and remained some time in Philippi. He was Paul's fellow traveler to Asia and Jerusalem (Acts 21:17). He likewise was with him in his imprisonment in Caesarea, and then on to Rome. There is no doubt that Luke had completely written and sent forth the Book of the Acts of the Apostles at the end of the two years mentioned in Acts 28:30, though the critics claim a much later period.

The Contents and Scope of the Book

The first verse gives us an important hint. The former treatise, the Gospel of Luke, contains that Jesus began to do and teach. The Book of Acts contains therefore the continuation of the Lord's actions, no longer on earth, but from the Glory. The actions of the risen and glorified Christ can easily be traced through the entire Book. We give a few illustrations. In the first Chapter He acts in the selection of the twelfth Apostle who was to take the place of Judas. In the second chapter He himself poured forth the Holy Spirit, for Peter made the declaration "therefore, being by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He has poured out this which ye behold and hear." And in the close of the second chapter we behold another action of the risen Lord, "the Lord added to the assembly daily those that were to be saved." In the third chapter He manifested His power in the healing of the lame man. Throughout this Book we behold Him acting from the Glory, guiding, directing, comforting and encouraging His servants. These beautiful and manifold evidences of Himself being with His own and manifesting His power in their behalf can easily be traced in the different chapters.

Then on the very threshold of the Book we have the historical account of the coming of that other Comforter, whom the Lord had promised, the Holy Spirit. On the day of Pentecost the third Person of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit, came. His coming marks the birthday of the Church. After that event we see Him present with His people as well as in them. In connection with the Lord's servants in filling them, guiding them, fitting them, sustaining them in trials and persecutions, in the affairs of the church, we behold the actions of the Holy Spirit on earth. He is the great administrator in the church. Over fifty times we find Him mentioned, so that some have called this Book; "the Acts of the Holy Spirit." There are no doctrines about the Holy Spirit and His work in the Book of Acts. But we find the practical illustrations of the doctrines of the Holy Spirit found elsewhere in the New Testament.

In the third place another supernatural Being is seen acting in this Book. It is the enemy, Satan, the hinderer and the accuser of the brethren. We behold him coming upon the scene and acting through his different instruments, either as the roaring lion, or as the cunning deceiver with his wiles. Wherever he can, he

attempts to hinder the progress of the Gospel. This is a most important aspect of this Book, and indeed very instructive. Aside from the human instruments prominent in this Book of Acts, we behold three supernatural Beings acting. The risen and glorified Christ, the Holy Spirit, and Satan.

Another hint about the contents of this Book and its scope we find at the close of the Gospel of Luke. There the risen Christ said “that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His Name to all the nations beginning at Jerusalem.” In the first chapter of Acts the Spirit of God reports the commission of the Lord, about to ascend, in full. “Ye shall be my witnesses both in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.” The Book of Acts shows us how this mission, beginning in Jerusalem, was carried out. The witness begins in the City where our Lord was crucified. Once more an offer was made to the nation Israel. Then we behold the Gospel going forth from Jerusalem and all Judea to Samaria. and after that to the Gentiles. and through the Apostle Paul it is heralded in the different countries of the Roman empire. The parable of our Lord in Matthew 22:1-10 gives us prophetically the history of these events. First the guests were called to the wedding and they would not come. This was the invitation given by the Lord to His earthly people when He moved among them. They received Him not. Then came a renewed offer with the assurance that all things are ready. This is exactly what we find in the beginning in the Book of the Acts. Once more to Jerusalem and to the Jewish nation is offered the kingdom, and signs and miracles take place to show that Jesus is the Christ risen from the dead. In the above parable our Lord predicted what the people would do with the servants, who bring the second offer. They would ignore the message and treat the servants spitefully and kill them. This we find fulfilled in the persecution which broke out in Jerusalem, when Apostles were imprisoned and others were killed. The Lord also predicted in His parable the fate of the wicked City. It was to be burned. Thus it happened to Jerusalem. And after the second offer had been rejected the servants were to go to the highways to invite the guests. And this shows that the invitation was to go out to the Gentiles.

Jerusalem is in the foreground in this Book, for the beginning was to be in Jerusalem “to the Jew first.” The end of the Book takes us to Rome, and we see the great Apostle a prisoner there, a most significant, prophetic circumstance.

The Division of the Book of Acts

“But ye shall receive power after that the Holy Spirit is come upon you, and ye shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem and in all Judea and in Samaria and unto the uttermost part of the earth” (Acts 1:8). This verse in the beginning of the book is the key to the historical account it contains. The Holy Spirit came on

the day of Pentecost and the witness to Christ began. We make a threefold division.

I. The Witness to Jerusalem. The Advent of the Spirit and the Formation of the Church. The Offer to Israel and its Rejection. Chapter 1-7.

II. The Witness to Samaria. Saul's Conversion and Peter's Witness in Caesarea. Chapter 8-12.

III. The Witness to the Gentiles. The Apostle to the Gentiles, His Ministry and Captivity. Chapter 13-28.

While undoubtedly all witnessed, the book of Acts reports mostly the acts of Peter and Paul. The Apostle Peter is in the foreground in the first part of the book. After the twelfth chapter he is mentioned but once more. Then Paul comes upon the scene with His great testimony concerning "The Gospel of Christ, the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth." Jerusalem is Prominent in the start. Antioch, the Gentile centre of Christian activity, follows, and Rome is seen at the close of the book. The witness of which the risen Lord spoke was therefore given to Jerusalem, in all Judea, in Samaria. Then to the uttermost part of the earth. Africa received a witness in the conversion of the Ethiopian Eunuch. Then followed the witness to Asia and Europe. The book of Acts ends, so to speak, in an unfinished way.

Part I

The Witness to Jerusalem.

Chapter 1

1.The forty days

Verses 1-8. Post-resurrection teaching

Verses 9-11. The ascension and promised return

Verses 12-14. The ten-day wait for the Spirit

Verses 15-26. Choice of Matthias

The Advent of the Spirit and the Formation of the Church.

The Offer to Israel and its Rejection.

Chapters 1-7

1. *The Introduction* (Acts 1:1-3).
2. *The final words of the risen Lord* (Acts 1:4-8).
3. *The ascension* (Acts 1:9-11).
4. *The waiting company* (Acts 1:12-14).
5. *Matthias chosen in the place of Judas* (Acts 1:15-26).

The introductory words prove that Luke is the writer. In the former treatise, Luke had addressed to Theophilus (the Gospel of Luke) the beginning of the teaching, and acts of our Lord were reported. The Book of Acts reveals the same wonderful person witnessed to by the Holy Spirit. Eight things are mentioned concerning our Lord in the beginning of this book. 1. His earthly life of doing and teaching. 2. He gave them commandment. 3. He had suffered. 4. He had showed Himself after His passion by many infallible proofs. 5. He was seen by them for forty days. 6. He spoke of the things which concern the Kingdom of God. 7. He was taken up. 8. He will come again. Once more He gave to them the promise of the coming of the Holy Spirit. In Acts 1:5 we read “ye shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days hence.” John the Baptist had spoken also of a baptism with fire. The Lord omits the word fire, because the baptism with fire is a judgment act linked with His second coming (See Matthew 3:12). The question they asked of Him concerning the restoration of the Kingdom to Israel was perfectly in order. This is the Hope of Israel; the Hope of the church is not an earthly kingdom, but a heavenly glory; not to be subjects in the kingdom on earth, but to reign and rule with the King. The answer they received assured them that the kingdom was to be restored to Israel; the times and seasons for that, however, rested with the Father.

Then they saw Him ascending. What a sight it must have been! Their Lord was “received into Glory.” Gradually in majestic silence He must have been lifted out of their midst. Lovingly His eyes must have rested upon them, while their eyes saw only Him. Then a cloud received Him out of their sight. “And then a cloud took Him in (literal rendering) out of their sight.” The cloud was not a common cloud of vapor, but the glory-cloud. It was the cloud of glory which had filled Solomon’s temple, which so often in Israel’s past history had appeared as an outward sign of Jehovah’s presence. Then angels announced His coming in like manner. And thus He will come, even back to the Mount of Olives (Zechariah 14:4).

However, we must beware of confounding this event given here with that blessed Hope, which is the Hope of the church. The Coming of the Lord here is His visible Coming as described in the prophetic books of the Old Testament; it is His coming to establish His rule upon the earth. it is the event spoken of in Daniel 7:14 and Revelation 1:7. When He comes in like manner as He went up, His Saints come with Him (Colossians 3:4; 1 Thessalonians 3:13). The Hope of the church is to meet Him in the air, and not to see Him coming in the clouds of heaven. The coming here “in like manner” is His Coming for Israel and the nations. The Coming of the Lord for His Church, before His visible and glorious manifestation, is revealed in 1 Thessalonians 4:16-18. It is well to keep these important truths in mind. Confusion between these is disastrous. He left them to enter into the Holy of Holies, to exercise the priesthood which Aaron exercised on the day of atonement, though our Lord is a priest after the order of Melchisedec. And when this promise of the two men in white garments is fulfilled, He will come forth to be a priest upon His throne.

Then we see them as a waiting company. They are not the church. Their waiting for the Coming of the Holy Spirit ended ten days after, when the Holy Spirit came. Since then He is here. To wait for another outpouring of the Holy Spirit, as so often done by well meaning people, is unscriptural. Among the waiting ones were “Mary the mother of Jesus and His brethren.” The one chosen by God’s grace to be the mother of our Lord; Mary, who had conceived by the Holy Spirit, is waiting with the other disciples. This proves that she has no place of superiority among God’s people. When the Holy Spirit came she too was baptized by the Spirit into the one body of which, through the Grace of God, she is a member like any other believer in our Lord. After this she is not mentioned again in the Word of God. Mary, the mother of Jesus, has absolutely no relation with the redemption work of the Son of God. His brethren, according to John 7:5, were unbelieving. Since then they had also believed on Him.

The action of Peter in proposing to place another in Judas’ place was not a mistake as some claim. Peter acted upon the Scriptures and was guided by the Lord. Some hold that Paul was meant to be the twelfth apostle. This is incorrect. Paul’s apostleship was of an entirely different nature than that of the twelve. Not till Israel’s complete failure had been demonstrated in the stoning of Stephen was he called, and then not of men, but by revelation of Jesus Christ. There is positive proof that the Holy Spirit sanctioned this action of the disciples. See 1 Corinthians 15:5-8. Furthermore, twelve apostles were needed as a body of witnesses to the entire nation. How strange it would have been if Peter and the ten, eleven men in all, instead of twelve, had stood up on the day of Pentecost to witness to Christ in the presence of the assembled multitude.

Chapter 2

2.The Spirit's advent – birth of the church

Verses 1-13. The advent of the Spirit

Verses 14-47. The results of the advent of the Spirit

Verses 1-47

- 1. The Outpouring of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:1-4).*
- 2. The Immediate Effect of His Presence (Acts 2:5-13).*
- 3. Peter's Address (Acts 2:14-36).*
- 4. The Result of the Witness (Acts 2:37-41).*
- 5. The Gathered Company in Fellowship (Acts 2:42-47).*

This is an important chapter. The Promise of the Father was fulfilled, the Holy Spirit, the third person of the Trinity came down to earth, to be the other Comforter. He came on that blessed day.

Two things are at once apparent. He came upon the assembled believers individually, and also did a work in a corporate way. Each believer on that day was filled with the Holy Spirit. He came as the indweller to each. But He also was present as the mighty rushing wind which filled all the house. He did not only come upon each, but all were baptized with the Holy Spirit, and united into a body. In 1 Corinthians 12:13 the more complete revelation is given concerning this fact. "For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free, and have been all made to drink into one Spirit." The One Spirit is the Holy Spirit as He came on the day of Pentecost, the One Body is the church. All believers were on that day united by the Spirit into the one body, and since then, whenever and wherever a sinner believes in the finished work of Christ, he shares in that baptism and is joined by the same Spirit to that one body. A believer may be in dense ignorance about all this, as indeed a great many are; but this does not alter the gracious fact of what God has done. The believing company was then formed on the day of Pentecost into one body. It was the birthday of the church.

There is an interesting correspondence between the second chapter of Luke and the second chapter of Acts which we cannot pass by. In the first chapter of Luke we have the announcement of the birth of the Saviour. In the second chapter of the Gospel of Luke we read of the accomplishment of that Promise given to the

Virgin. And so the second chapter of Acts contains the fulfillment of a similar promise. The Holy Spirit came and the church, the mystical body of Christ, began.

But the truth concerning the church was not revealed on the day of Pentecost. The twelve apostles were ignorant of what had taken place, and that the church formed would be composed of believing Gentiles as well as believing Jews; nor did they know anything of the different relationships of the church. Through the Apostle Paul the full truth concerning the church was made known.

The Coming of the Holy Spirit was accompanied with visible signs. A new dispensation was inaugurated with outward signs, just as the giving of the law for that dispensation was accompanied with similar signs. (Hebrews 12:18-19.) The rushing mighty wind filled the house, “and there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire and it sat upon each of them.” The filling of the house indicated the fact that His abode would be the house; the church and the parted tongues upon each head testified to the fact that each had received Him. The Person, not a power or influence given by measure, had filled each believer. He came as the gift of God.

Then they spoke in different languages. The speaking in other languages was a miracle produced by the Holy Spirit, who had come upon them in mighty power. These Galileans spoke in different tongues, sixteen at least, if not more. “By a sudden and powerful inspiration of the Holy Spirit, these disciples uttered, not of their own minds, but as mouthpieces of the Holy Spirit, the praises of God in various languages hitherto, and possibly at the time itself, unknown to them” (Dean Alford in Greek Testament).

The significance of this miracle speaking in other tongues is not hard to discover. It was the oral manifestation of the parted tongues of fire, which had come upon each. Besides this it proclaimed the great fact that the Holy Spirit had come to make known the blessed Gospel to all nations under heaven, and though no Gentiles were present when this took place, the languages of the Gentiles were heard, and that from Jewish lips, showing that the Gospel should go forth unto the uttermost part of the earth. But did they utter all an orderly discourse, preaching the truth concerning Christ, or was their speech of an ecstatic nature, in the form of praising God? We believe the latter was the case. We look in vain through this book for the evidences that these believers continued speaking these different languages.

Now, while it is true that there was such a gift as speaking in an unknown tongue in the apostolic age, and no Christian believer would doubt the power of God to impart to a person the gift to preach the Gospel in a foreign tongue, we do not believe that this gift of speaking in an unknown tongue was to abide in

the church. Repeatedly claims were made in years gone by that it had been restored (for instance during the Irvingite delusion in England), but in every case it was found to be spurious or emanating from the enemy. The present day “apostolic or Pentecostal movement” with its high pretensions and false doctrines, lacking true scriptural knowledge and wisdom, creating new schisms in the body, with its women leaders and teachers, has all the marks of the same great counterfeiter upon it. (For a closer examination of the speaking in tongues see our larger work on Acts.)

Then Peter stood up with the eleven and gave his great testimony. What boldness he manifested! What a change from the Peter before Pentecost! It was the result of the Holy Spirit he had received. His address dealt with the great historical facts of the Gospel, bearing witness to the resurrection and exaltation of the Lord Jesus. In its scope and pointedness it is a remarkable production. It has three parts. 1. He repudates the charge of drunkenness and quotes from Joel, avoiding, however, the statement that Joel’s prophecy was fulfilled (Acts 2:14-22). (Joel’s Prophecy will be fulfilled in connection with the second Coming of Christ. Then the Holy Spirit, after the predicted judgments are passed, will be poured out upon all flesh. To put the fulfilment in our day is erroneous. See our Exposition of Joel.)

2. Next he gives a brief testimony of the life and the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. He quotes from the sixteenth Psalm (Acts 2:23-28). 3. The last part of his address shows that the Holy Spirit had come as the result of the resurrection and exaltation of the Lord Jesus Christ. The briefest but deepest Messianic Psalm is quoted in this section (Psalms 110:1-7). The address as reported closes with the significant word: “Let the whole house of Israel, therefore, assuredly know that God has made Him, this Jesus whom you have crucified, both Lord and Christ” (Acts 2:29-36). Notice how the Holy Spirit uses through Peter the Word of God. The Holy Spirit testifies in and through the written Word. The aim of Peter’s address was to prove to the house of Israel that the crucified One is raised from the dead and that God made Him Lord and Christ, witnessed to by the presence of the Holy Spirit. The Person of Christ and His work is still the great theme. Whenever He is preached the power of God will accompany the message.

Wonderful results followed. The Word had been preached and the power of the Holy Spirit brought the great truths to the hearts and consciences of the hearers. Their guilt in having crucified Jesus had been fully demonstrated, and now they asked, “Now, brethren, what shall we do?” Peter gives the needed answer. Repentance and baptism are the conditions. If these are fulfilled remission of sins and the gift of the Holy Spirit are promised to follow. Peter’s words wrongly interpreted have led to much confusion. Upon these words doctrines, especially concerning water baptism, have been built, which are not alone

nowhere else taught in the Bible, but which are opposed to the Gospel. The words of Peter to his Jewish brethren have been used to make water baptism a saving ordinance, that only by submission to water baptism, with repentance and faith in the Lord Jesus, can remission of sins and the gift of the Holy Spirit be obtained. We do not enlarge upon these unscriptural conceptions nor answer the utterly false doctrine of “baptismal regeneration”, but rather point out briefly what these words of Peter mean. We must bear in mind that Peter addressed those who had openly rejected Jesus. They had, therefore, also openly to acknowledge their wrong and thus openly own Him as Messiah, whom they had disowned by delivering Him into the hands of lawless men. Repentance meant for them to own their guilt in having opposed and rejected Jesus. Baptism in the name of Jesus Christ (in which it differs from the baptism of John) was the outward expression of that repentance. It was for these Jews, therefore, a preliminary necessity. And here we must not forget that Peter’s preaching on the day of Pentecost had it still to do with the kingdom, as we shall more fully learn from his second address in the third chapter. Another offer of the kingdom was made to the nation. The great fact that the Holy Spirit had begun to form the body of Christ, the church, as stated before, was not revealed then. In this national testimony the word “repent” stands in the foreground, and their baptism in the name of Him whom they had crucified was a witness that they owned Him now and believed on Him.

About three thousand souls were added, who repented and were baptized. Then we behold them in blessed fellowship. Doctrine stands first. It is the prominent thing. They continued steadfastly in the Apostle’s doctrine. In the doctrine of the Apostles they were in fellowship together, and that fellowship was expressed in “the breaking of bread.” It was not a common meal, but the carrying out of the request the Lord had made in the night He was betrayed, when He instituted what we call “the Lord’s supper.” Prayer is also mentioned. They had all things in common. They were like a great family, which in reality they were through the Grace of God.

And how happy they were! They had Christ, and that was enough. No system of theology, creeds, set of forms or any such thing, with which historical Christianity abounds--”Nothing but Christ.” They received their food with gladness and singleness of heart, praising God and having favor with all the people. Joy and singleness of heart are two great characteristics of the true believer.

Chapter 3

Ch.3-4. The first miracle and its results

3:1-11. The healing of the lame man

3:12-26. Peter's second sermon

Verses 1-26

1. The Healing of the lame Man (Acts 3:1-11).

2. Peter's address and appeal (Acts 3:12-26).

The lame man, forty years old, at the gate called Beautiful is the type of the moral condition of the nation, like the impotent man whom the Lord healed (John 5:1-47). Israel with all its beautiful religious ceremonies was helpless, laying outside with no strength to enter in. Peter commands the lame man in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth to rise up and to walk. He is instantly healed. He then walked and leaped and entered through the gate as a worshipper into the temple, praising God. This great miracle was wrought as another evidence to the unbelieving nation that Jesus of Nazareth, whom they had rejected and crucified, is their Messiah and King. It was a proof that the rejected One, who had died on a cross and had been buried, is living in Glory, and that God's omnipotent power had been revealed in answer to that name. The miracle also denoted that the promised kingdom was once more offered to the nation. Concerning that kingdom, when it comes, it is written that "the lame man shall leap as an hart." (Isaiah 35:6.) But the lame man, so wonderfully healed, leaping and praising God, is likewise a picture of what the nation will be in a future day, when they will look upon Him whom they have pierced (See Zechariah 12:10; Ezekiel 36:27; Isaiah 12:1-6; Isaiah 35:10). Peter delivers his second address. Interesting and of much importance are Acts 3:19-21. They can only be understood in the right way if we do not lose sight of the fact to whom they were addressed, that is to Jews, and not to Gentiles. They are the heart of this discourse, and as such a God-given appeal and promise to the nation. If this is lost sight of, the words must lose their right meaning. The repentance which is demanded of them is an acknowledgment of the wrong they had done in denying the Holy and righteous One, a confession of their blood-guiltiness in having slain the author of life. This, of course, would result in their conversion and the blotting out of their sins as a nation. This God had promised before to the nation (Isaiah 44:22-23).

The "times of refreshing" and "restitution of all things" are expressions in which the Holy Spirit gathers together the hundreds of promises He gave through the different prophets of God concerning a time of great blessing for His people, and

through them for the nations of the world. It would be impossible to mention all these promises and in what the times of refreshing and restoration of all things consist. These days of a coming age, the kingdom age, or as we call it because its duration will be a thousand years, the Millennium, are fully described on the pages of Old Testament prophecy. Not alone will the nation be blessed, but Jerusalem will be a great city; the land will be restored and become the great center for blessing; the nations of the earth will receive blessings, and groaning creation will be delivered from its groans and the curse which rests upon it. If we interpret the Word of Prophecy literally and cease spiritualizing it, we shall have no difficulty to behold the full meaning of the times of refreshing and the restitution of all things. The latter word does not include a restoration of the wicked dead, a second chance for those who passed out of this life in an unsaved condition. And these glorious times cannot come till the Lord Jesus Christ comes again.



The Temple area today

Chapter 4

4: 1-37. The result.

Verses 1-37

1. *Their Arrest* (Acts 4:1-3).
2. *The Result of the Testimony* (Acts 4:4).
3. *Peter and John before the Rulers and Elders* (Acts 4:5-7).
4. *Peter's bold witness* (Acts 4:8-12).
5. *The astonished Sanhedrin and their Release* (Acts 4:13-22).
6. *With their own company* (Acts 4:23-31).
7. *The saved multitude* (Acts 4:32-37).

The enemy begins now his acts, and the first indication is given that the offer God's mercy was making to the nation would not be accepted. The Holy Spirit was acting mightily through the spoken Word, but these ecclesiastical leaders were hardening their hearts against the Word and the Spirit of God. The hate against that blessed Name broke out anew under the satanic power to which they had yielded. And the Sadducees came too. Though not much had been said on the resurrection, yet these rationalists, or as we would call them today, "higher critics," were much distressed because they preached Jesus and the resurrection. The next step is the arrest and imprisonment of the two apostles. Rough hands seize them. Of the Apostles we read nothing else. They submitted. The power of the Holy Spirit now manifested itself in a new way with them. They could suffer, and perhaps with great joy; in perfect peace they allowed themselves to be taken away.

We have here also the first fulfilment of the many predictions given by our Lord that His own were to suffer persecution (Matthew 10:16-17; Mark 13:9; John 20:20). In Peter's witness we see the effect of the filling with the Spirit. What holy boldness he exhibited! He quotes the same Scripture passage to the assembled Sanhedrin, which the Lord had mentioned in their presence (See Matthew 22:23-41).

They knew that the Lord meant them when He quoted that verse, that they were the builders, who were to reject Him. They had done so in fulfilment of that

prophecy. Peter's words are directed straight at them, "He is the stone which has been set at naught by you, the builders."

The rejected stone had become the corner stone. The One whom they had delivered up and cast out had been given the prominent place of the corner stone upon whom, as the foundation stone, everything rests, and who unites the building.

Peter closes with the statement that salvation is only in Him whom they had set at naught. There is no other Name given to men by which man can be saved, and that is the Name of Him who had made this lame man whole. Salvation they all needed. They, too, rulers, elders, chief priests must be saved. But only in Him God had procured salvation free and complete for all who will have it by believing on Him. This salvation was offered to these rulers, the builders who had rejected the Lord.

They were then threatened by the astonished rulers and elders and set at liberty. We find them in their own company and after praise and prayer new manifestations of the Holy Spirit follow. In the closing verses we have another glimpse of the assembly in Jerusalem.

Chapter 5

5. Discipline and persecution

Verses 1-11. Ananias and Sapphira's sin

Verses 12-42. Owerful witness to the Jewish nation

Verses 1-42

- 1. Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:1-10).*
- 2. Signs and wonders by the Apostles (Acts 5:11-16).*
- 3. The second arrest of the Apostles and their Deliverance (Acts 5:17-25).*
- 4. Before the Council (Acts 5:26-33).*
- 5. Gamaliel's Advice (Acts 5:34-39).*
- 6. The Apostles beaten and dismissed (Acts 5:40-42).*

With this chapter the scene changes. Beautiful is the ending of the previous chapter, Barnabas having sold his land, laid the money at the feet of the

Apostles. He gave by it a striking testimony how he realized as a believing Jew his heavenly portion, by giving up that which is promised to the Jew, earthly possessions.

Our chapter begins with the significant word “But.” It is the word of failure and decline. All was evidently perfect; nothing marred the precious scenes of fellowship--”but,” and with this little word the story of evil begins. The enemy seeing himself so completely defeated by his attacks from the outside now enters among the flock and begins his work within.

Ananias and Sapphira were lying to the Holy Spirit. Swift judgment followed as to their earthly existence. They were cut off by death. The sin they had done was “a sin unto death” and the sentence, physical death, was immediately carried out. Peter is still in the foreground. We must remember here the words of the Lord which He spake to Peter, after this disciple had confessed Him as Son of God. “And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatsoever thou shalt bind upon earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven” (Matthew 16:19). The same words concerning binding and loosing the Lord addressed to all the disciples (Matthew 18:18). The binding and loosing refers to discipline on earth. It has nothing whatever to do with forgiveness of sins or eternal salvation. Peter here exercises this authority, it was the first discipline. We must likewise remember that these events happened on Jewish, on kingdom ground. The witness was still to the nation. The sudden judgment which came upon Ananias and Sapphira was a strong witness to the nation that the Holy One of Israel, Jehovah, dwelt in the midst of this remnant, who believed in the One whom the nation had rejected. When the kingdom is established on earth and the Lord Jesus Christ rules in righteousness, then, no doubt, every sin will be swiftly judged by death.

Great things followed. Their habitual place seems to have been in Solomon’s porch. No one dared to join them. They held the position of authority. Though they had been forbidden the public ministry they are back in a prominent place. The people magnified them too. Then another result was that more believers were added. Added to what? The First Hebrew Christian Church of Jerusalem? The First Jewish Christian Society? No. They were added to the Lord. The sinner believing is saved, receives the Holy Spirit, is joined to the Lord, becomes one spirit with the Lord, a member of the body of which He is the Head. Signs and wonders were done by the Apostles. The sick were healed, unclean spirits were driven out. Multitudes of people from the surrounding country flocked to Jerusalem, bringing their sick, and they were all healed. They waited even in the streets for the time when Peter walked along so that his shadow might fall on some of them. These were great manifestations of the power of God. The words spoken by the Lord were then fulfilled. They did the

works He did. These signs and wonders, however, are nowhere mentioned as to their permanency throughout this age. They were only for the beginning of this age; after the Gospel of Grace and the mystery hidden in former ages had been fully made known they disappeared.

All the Apostles were then arrested and Put into the common prison. During the night an angel of the Lord opened the prison door and led them out. Such a manifestation was perfectly in order at that time, and fully corresponds with the other kingdom characteristics in the beginning of this book. But these supernatural manifestations have ceased. Peter once more with the other Apostles bears witness to the resurrection and exaltation of the rejected Christ. On the advice of Gamaliel they were released after they had been beaten. With rejoicing that they had been counted worthy to suffer shame for His Name, they departed and continued in their great ministry.



St. Stephen's Gate Jerusalem

Chapter 6

5. The first deacons

Verses 1-7. Choosing the seven

Verses 8-15. Stephen's ministry and arrest

Verses 1-15

1. The Murmuring of the Grecians against the Hebrews (Acts 6:1-7).

2. Stephen; His Ministry and Arrest (Acts 6:8-15).

Another failure is brought before us. The enemy acts again. From without and from within Satan pressed upon that which was of God. While the Lord Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit acted in Grace and power, the enemy came in to disturb. It is still so. Whenever there is a door opened there are also many adversaries (1 Corinthians 16:9).

The flesh manifested itself in murmuring. The assembly took care of the poor; widows being specially helpless, were the objects of daily ministrations. The Jews themselves in connection with the synagogue had special funds for them. They must have also formed a recognized group in the early church (1 Timothy 5:9-10). The ministration is the distribution mentioned in Chapter 4:35, and as the multitude was very great, including, perhaps, hundreds of widows, this work was quite a task. Murmurings arose and these were born of jealousy, the result of unbelief. It is the first indication of weakness and failure. This reminds us of the murmurings of Israel as recorded in the book of Exodus. The same old thing, the changeless flesh, shows itself among the saved and united company of believers, indwelt by the Holy Spirit. The murmurings were on the side of the Grecians. Their complaint was against the Hebrews that the Grecian widows were being overlooked. The Grecians were not, as some teach, Gentiles, but they were Greek-speaking Jews, born in countries outside of Palestine, and therefore called Hellenists, or Grecians.

The murmuring is at once arrested. Seven men are chosen under the direction of the Holy Spirit. The Apostles declared "we will give ourselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the Word." The Holy Spirit thus separated the gifts called to minister in spiritual things from those in temporal matters. Note how prayer is put before the ministry of the Word. There can be no effectual ministry, no successful preaching and teaching of the Word, unless it is preceded by prayer.

The seven chosen ones are then named. While we know little of these men and the service they rendered, with the exception of Stephen and Philip, it is an interesting fact that their names are all Greek. In this the grace of God is beautifully exhibited. The Grecians were the murmurers, and no doubt they were fewer in number than the Hebrews. A modern day church meeting would have proposed to elect a committee composed of equal numbers of the two parties. But not so here.

Grace and wisdom from above are manifested in this action. The entire seven were chosen from those who had complained. This was the blessed rebuke of Grace.

The seven were then set before the Apostles, and when they had prayed they laid their hands on them. As this “laying on of hands” is so much misunderstood, and has been made an act by which authority, power and blessing is claimed to be conferred, we must say a brief word on it. It is always proper in reading and interpreting the Word of God, to see if not elsewhere in the Bible the terms or things to be interpreted are used, so that through them the right meaning can be ascertained. The laying on of hands is first mentioned in the Book of Leviticus. In the opening chapters of that book we read how the offerer was to lay his hand upon the head of the offering. Thus we read of the Peace offering: “He shall lay his hand upon the head of his offering” (Leviticus 3:2). This meant the identification of the Israelite with the offering itself. And this is the meaning of the laying on of hands from the side of the Apostles. They identified themselves and the assembly with them in their work for which they had been chosen. It was a very simple and appropriate act to show their fellowship with them. All else which has been made of the laying on of hands is an invention. There is no Scripture for the present day usage in Christendom, that a man in order to preach the Gospel or teach the Word of God must be “ordained.”

miracles among the people. Certain of the synagogue of the Libertines and others disputed with Stephen. (It is wrong to call these “Libertines” free thinkers. Jews had been taken to Rome as slaves. Their descendants who had been liberated were called Libertines, that is freedmen. They were known as such in Jerusalem and hence the name “synagogue of the Libertines.”) And they were not able to resist the wisdom and the spirit by which he spake. Stephen is accused of blasphemy. The charge is “blasphemy against Moses and against God.” They succeeded in their satanic work by stirring up the people, the elders and the scribes. Three things are mentioned by them. He ceaseth not to speak words against this holy place, against the law, and that he should have said: “This Jesus of Nazareth shall destroy this place and shall change the customs which Moses delivered us.” And then they looked upon him, and behold his face

was like the face of an angel. All eyes were attracted to this wonderful sight. Steadfastly they looked upon a face of Glory; a face

reflecting heaven's light, heaven's Glory; a face reflecting the Glory of Him into whose presence he soon would be called. And may not that young man named Saul also have been there and seen that face? And that dark countenance of that young Pharisee of Tarsus was soon to behold that same Glory-light, and then tell the world of the Gospel of the Glory and that "we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory unto glory."

Chapter 7

7. Stephen's martyrdom

Verses 1-53. Stephen's sermon

Verses 54-60. Stephen's martyrdom

Verses 1-60

1. The Address of Stephen (Acts 7:1-53).

2. The Martyrdom of Stephen (Acts 7:54-60).

This is the largest chapter in this book and concludes the first section. Stephen is the chosen instrument to deliver the final testimony to the nation. He was not permitted to finish it.

We notice at once a marked difference between the previous preaching by the Apostle Peter and the address of Stephen. The testimony of Peter was marked on the day of Pentecost and at the other occasions by great brevity. Stephen's address is the longest discourse reported in the New Testament. The name of Jesus is prominent in all the addresses of Peter. The fact that He was rejected by the people, crucified and that He rose from the dead, and the call to repentance, were the leading features of Peter's preaching. Stephen does not mention the Name of Jesus at all, though he has the person of Christ and His rejection as the theme of his testimony. (The name "Jesus" appears in the A.V. in Acts 7:45; but it should be "Joshua" instead.) At the close of his address he speaks of the Just One of whom they had become betrayers and murderers.

Stephen had been accused of speaking against Moses and against God, also against the temple and the law. These accusations he is asked to answer. What he declared before the council shows plainly that the accusations are utterly

false. His speech is, therefore, partly apologetic; but it is also teaching, in that it shows certain truths from the historic events he cites. And before he finishes his testimony the accused becomes the accuser of the nation; the one to be judged becomes the judge. Indeed his whole testimony as he rapidly speaks of past history in his great and divinely arranged retrospect, is a most powerful testimony to the nation as well as against the nation.

The great address falls into the following sections: 1. Abraham's History (Acts 7:2-8). 2. Joseph and his brethren (Acts 7:9-16). 3. The Rejection of Moses. The rejected one became their Deliverer and Ruler (Acts 7:17-38). 4. The Story of the nation's apostasy and shame (Acts 7:39-50). Then Stephen ceased his historical retrospect, he addressed them directly. The accused witness becomes the mouthpiece of the Judge, who pronounces the sentence upon the nation. This is found in Acts 7:51-53. His martyrdom followed.

Three things are mentioned of this first martyr. He was full of the Holy Spirit; he looked steadfastly into heaven, seeing the glory of God; he saw Jesus standing on the right hand of God.

This is the first manifestation of the glorified Christ, which we have on record. There are three of them only. He appeared here to Stephen. Then He appeared unto Saul, who consented unto Stephen's death. Saul beheld Him in that Glory, brighter than the noon-day sun, and heard His voice. The last time the glorified Christ manifested Himself was to John in the island of Patmos. These three appearances of the glorified Christ present to our view the three aspects of His Second Coming. First He comes to welcome His own into His presence. He will arise and come into the air to meet His beloved co-heirs there. This is represented by the first appearing to Stephen, standing to receive him. Then Israel will behold Him, they who pierced Him will see Him, as Saul of Tarsus beheld the Lord. Then He will appear as John saw Him, the One who judges the earth in righteousness.

And now after this great and glorious vision, Stephen bears testimony to it. "Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of Man standing on the right hand of God." He speaks of the Lord as "Son of Man." This is the only time outside of the Gospel records that we find this title of the Lord (aside from the old Testament reference in Hebrews 2:1-18).

They stoned him and Stephen, the mighty witness and mouthpiece of the Holy Spirit, fell asleep.

God's gracious offer and Christ had now been fully rejected by the nation. Stephen, who bore this last witness, is a striking evidence of the transforming power of Christ. How much like the Lord he was!

He was filled with the Spirit, full of faith and power, and like the Lord he did great wonders and miracles among the people. Like Christ, he was falsely accused of speaking against Moses, the law and the temple, and of being a blasphemer. They brought him before the same council and did what they did with the Lord, bringing false witnesses against him. He gave witness to the truth of the confession the Lord had given before the council, that He was to sit at the right hand of God. He beheld Him there. The Lord Jesus committed His spirit in the Father's hands, and Stephen prayed that the Lord Jesus receive his spirit; and like the Lord he prayed for the forgiveness of his enemies. May the same power transform us all into the same image.

St. Stephen's Gate is so named because, according to some traditions, St. Stephen was martyred near there. It has also been called Lion's Gate because of the four lions that decorate it on the outside. Finally, it has also been called St. Mary's Gate because the tomb of St. Mary is located just to the east of it in the Kidron Valley. Read more:

Archaeological light: The Lions Gate also called the St. Stephen's Gate

The Lions Gate is the eastern entrance into the Old City of Jerusalem. This gate, like many of the gates of Jerusalem, was built by the Ottomans in 1538-39 AD along the same stretch of walls as the Golden Gate. As mentioned above, the Ottomans also sealed the Golden Gate shut. The Lions Gate also faces the Kidron Valley and Mount of Olives.

The gate was originally built with an L-shaped structure, similar to the other Ottoman gates of Jerusalem. However, this L-shaped structure was later altered in order to allow vehicle access. The gate was tabbed St. Stephen's Gate as well, though the Damascus Gate is the likeliest site of Stephen's martyrdom. Other names of the Lions Gate include The Gate of Jehoshafat, in Arabic Bab sitt Miriam, the Gate of the Tribes, and St. Anna's Gate. Muslim tradition holds that the virgin Mary was born inside the gatehouse. Hence the name Bab sitt Miriam, which translates in English as The Gate of Mary. As one enters the gate, the road to St. Anna is on the right, thus the name St. Anna's Gate.



*In Hebrew the gate is called Sha'ar Ha'araiot, which also translates as the Gate of the Lions. The Lion is the symbol of Jerusalem. In **Genesis 49:9** Jacob compares his son Judah to a lion. The Tribe of Judah became the royal tribe of Jerusalem with the ascension of David to the throne ca 1000 B.C. Thus, the lion became the symbol for the tribe of Judah, and eventually all of Jerusalem. Jerusalem was the Southern Kingdom's capital city.*

Four lions decorate the facade of the gate lending the gate its name. These lions were said to have been built by Suleiman under the influence of a dream. The legend goes that Suleiman had desired to punish the Jews of Jerusalem. However, he had a dream in which he was devoured by lions, thus his mind was swayed. Instead, he built the Lions Gate adding the lions to commemorate the occasion.

During the Six Day War of 1967 Israeli paratroopers from the 55th Paratrooper Brigade entered the city through the Lions Gate. Simultaneously, Israeli forces flooded through the other gates of Jerusalem as they all converged on the Western Wall. The Old City of Jerusalem was back in Israelite hands and the gates of Jerusalem were now under full Jewish control.



Historical light: Orthodox Christianity in Ethiopia

The country embraced Christianity and maintained the doctrine of Christ from the era of the Apostles to the present day, as it is narrated in (Acts 8:26-39). The history of St. Phillip the Apostle baptizing the Eunuch who was very much interested in religion, is of great interest for the Ethiopian Church history. This Eunuch was a man of high rank, the finance minister of Candace Queen of Ethiopia.

Eusebius speaks of him as the first fruits of the faithful in the whole world. Irenius writes that preached the Gospel of the Ethiopians. Other evidence is that during the time that the Eunuch preached Christianity, Ethiopian women wore crosses upon their heads signifying the recognition of the Crucifixion of Christ. Besides St. John Chrysostom witnessed that among those who were present at Pentecost (the birth of the Universal Church) were Ethiopians.

In the history of the Church, it is further recorded that St. Matthew the Apostle preached the Gospel to the Ethiopians and won a few converts to the new doctrine and left the country.

Part II

The Witness to Samaria.

Chapter 8

8. The Samaritans admitted to gospel privilege

Verses 1-17. Philip's ministry in Samaria

Verses 18-24. Simon the magician

Verses 26-40. The Ethiopian eunuch

Verses 1-40

Saul's Conversion and Peter's Witness in Caesarea.

- 1. The first great persecution (Acts 8:1-3).*
- 2. The preaching of the scattered believers. Philip in Samaria (Acts 8:4-8).*
- 3. Events in Samaria (Acts 8:9-24).*
- 4. The Gospel in many villages of Samaria (Acts 8:25).*
- 5. Philip and the Eunuch (Acts 8:26-40).*

The final testimony to the rulers of the people had been given. It was rejected, and the Spirit filled messenger killed. The last offer had therefore been completely rejected. The Gospel is now to be sent to the Gentiles. The eighth chapter gives the record how Samaria heard the Gospel.

Saul, the young Pharisee, was consenting unto Stephen's death. Later he refers to the scene, which must have been impossible for him to erase from his memory. "When the blood of Stephen was shed, I was standing by and keeping the garments of them that slew him" (Acts 22:20). Concerning Saul the Lord said to Ananias, "I will shew him how great things he must suffer for my name's sake" (9:16). What was done unto Stephen was done unto Saul. The Jews and Saul with them, as we believe, disputed and resisted Stephen in the synagogue. The Jews disputed with Paul, resisted him, and rejected his testimony. Stephen was accused of blasphemy; so was Paul (Acts 19:37). Stephen was accused of speaking against Moses, the holy place and the customs; so was Paul (Acts

21:28; Acts 24:6; Acts 25:8; Acts 28:17). They rushed upon Stephen with one accord and seized him. The same happened to Paul (Acts 19:29). Stephen was dragged out of the city. So was Paul (Acts 14:19). Stephen was tried before the Sanhedrin; so did Paul appear before the Sanhedrin. Stephen was stoned and Paul was stoned at Lystra. Stephen suffered martyrdom; so did Paul in Rome. And yet, with all the sufferings that Paul had to undergo, he rejoiced. His eyes rested constantly upon that glorious One, whom Stephen, filled with the Holy Spirit, beheld in Glory. Later we hear him crying out from the prison in Rome, "That I may know Him, and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being made conformable unto His death" (Philippians 3:10).

The first great persecution then broke out against the church in Jerusalem. Saul was evidently the leader (Acts 26:10-11; 1 Corinthians 15:9; Galatians 1:13). But "the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church." God permitted this persecution that His Word might now be scattered abroad by the suffering saints. Philip, the Grecian Jew, one of the chosen seven, not an Apostle, is mightily used in preaching the Gospel in Samaria. The first missionary move to extend the Gospel was, therefore, not brought about under apostolic leadership, nor by the decree of an apostolic council, but by the Lord Himself. He led Philip to Samaria, where He Himself had been, yea to the very city of Samaria, Sychar (John 4:1-54). Great results followed the preaching of the Gospel. Miracles took place. Unclean spirits were driven out, many taken with palsies, and those who were lame were healed, so that there was great joy in that city. Simon Magus was a sinister instrument of Satan. He bewitched the people of Samaria, claiming to be some great one.

The hour of deliverance came for the Samaritans when Philip preached the Word, concerning the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ. Signs and great miracles followed, and the Samaritans believed and were baptized. The miracles were done to show the power of God, to attest the preaching of the Gospel by Philip, and to expose the counterfeit powers of Simon. And he, like the sorcerers of Egypt, had to own that this was the power of God. He was amazed when he beheld the great miracles. But more than that, he also believed, was baptized, and then continued with Philip. But his faith was not through the Word of God. God's Word alone can produce faith in man, for faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God. Simon was captivated by the miracles he had seen. Philip was deceived by him, but not Peter, who uncovered his Wickedness.

That the Holy Spirit had not been given to the Samaritans and that He was received by them after Peter and John had come from Jerusalem and laid hands on them, has puzzled many earnest students of the Word. It has also led to

erroneous teachings, as if the Holy Spirit must be received in a special manner after conversion.

The Samaritan believers had to be identified with those in Jerusalem, so much the more because there was a schism between Samaria and Jerusalem. Samaria had denied both the city of Jerusalem and the temple. This had to be ended and could no longer be tolerated. It was therefore divinely ordered that the gift of the Spirit in their case should be withheld till the two apostles came from Jerusalem. This meant an acknowledgment of Jerusalem; if the Holy Spirit had been imparted unto them at once it might have resulted in a continuance of the existing rivalry. And Peter is in the foreground and uses the keys of the kingdom of heaven here with the Samaritans as he did on the day of Pentecost with the Jews, and later with the Gentiles. Nowhere in the church epistles, in which the great salvation truths and blessings in Christ Jesus are revealed, is there a word said about receiving the Holy Spirit by the laying on of hands, or that one who has trusted in Christ and is born again should seek the gift of the Holy Spirit afterward.

The conversion of the Eunuch is full of blessed lessons. Philip was obedient to the call of the Lord and the Eunuch, the prominent Ethiopian, Queen Candace's treasurer, who had returned from Jerusalem, an unsatisfied seeker, believed on the Lord Jesus and went on his way rejoicing. Acts 8:37 is an interpolation and should be omitted. Philip was caught away and was found some twenty miles north of Gaza, at Azotus. From there he started out anew preaching the Gospel. In many cities his voice was heard. These coast cities were inhabited by many Gentiles and included larger places like Jamnia, Lydda, Joppa and Antipatris. The day of Christ will make known the labors and also the reward of this great Evangelist. Then he came to Caesarea. But did he stop with that? We do not know. Twenty years later we find him there and Paul was then his guest.



Saul Persecuting the Christians, and His Dramatic Conversion told

***SAUL, THE YOUNG** Pharisee, was a Jew. Although his home was in another country, he had come to Jerusalem when a boy to study the Jews' religion, and now he was a very strict Pharisee. He believed in the law of Moses, and he thought the new religion of Jesus would destroy this law which God gave to Moses. Therefore he was angry with the believers in Jesus, and he wished to be rid of them all.*

The chief priests and scribes were glad to have such an earnest young man as Saul take their part and defend their cause. They gave him permission to treat the disciples shamefully, hoping in this way to discourage others from accepting the new teachings. And so it was that Saul laboured night and day working and planning how he might destroy the church in Jerusalem.

Because of his work the prison-houses were crowded with men and women who clung to their faith in Jesus, but no longer were there listening crowds standing in the temple to hear the apostles teach. Saul had indeed stopped the public worship of these people, and he thought he had done a good work.

About this time news came to Jerusalem that the religion of Jesus was spreading in other cities. Instead of destroying it, the enemies were only scattering it farther and causing it to increase faster than before. What should they do?

Saul, the Pharisee, became angrier than ever. "I will stop this crazy religion yet!" he cried; and, rushing to the high priest, he asked permission to go as an officer to a Gentile city called Damascus and search among the Jews

there for disciples of Jesus. He planned to kill them or bind them as prisoners and carry them back to Jerusalem.

No doubt he hoped to visit every city and every village where the believers had gone to teach about Christ, and destroy the meetings as he had broken up the religious worship in Jerusalem.

The high priest wrote letters to the rulers of the synagogues in Damascus, telling them about Saul's purpose and commanding them to help Saul find the believers who might be in the city. These letters Saul took, and calling some friends he started at once on the long journey to Damascus.

The road they travelled led north from Jerusalem and passed through numbers of villages and towns. By and by he came near to Damascus, the Gentile city where a large number of Jews had accepted the new faith.

Messengers from Jerusalem had already arrived to warn the disciples in Damascus about Saul's work. They told about his bitter hatred of believers everywhere. And they told also of his soon coming to Damascus with letters from the high priest to the rulers of the synagogues, commanding that every believer in Jesus should be punished or imprisoned. And the believers wondered what they should do, for they feared the wrath of this proud young man.

On the last day of that journey the company of riders from Jerusalem were nearing the great wall of Damascus when suddenly they stopped.

A light from the sky, brighter than the shining noonday sun, had smitten them and struck them to the ground. And with the light came a voice from heaven, which only Saul understood though his companions heard the sound.

This voice said, "Saul! Saul! why are you persecuting me?"

Now Saul was greatly surprised. He had thought he was defending the true religion when he opposed the believers in Jesus. And he cried out, "Who are you, Lord?"

The voice answered, "I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom you are fighting against. It is hard for you to oppose me."

Like a flash of lightning Saul remembered how cruelly he had treated men and women who believed in this Jesus. He saw how wicked he had been. Now he cried out, "What shall I do, Lord?"

Jesus answered, "Rise up and go into Damascus; there you shall be told what you must do."

So Saul rose up; but he could not see which way to go, for the great light had blinded his eyes.

The men who were with Saul had also seen the light, but they were not blinded by its brightness. They, too, rose up, trembling with fright, and led him by the hand into the city. Here they took him to the house of a man whose name was Judas, and left him there.

Three days passed by, and Saul sat alone in dark blindness. He would neither eat nor drink, for his sorry of heart was great. He saw himself a very wicked man, not a righteous person at all, though he was a famous Pharisee. Then one night God gave him a vision. In the vision he seemed to see a believer named Ananias coming to put his hands on the blinded eyes that they might have sight again.

And sure enough, there was in the city of Damascus a believer named Ananias. This man also had a vision from God. And in the vision he heard God's voice calling, "Ananias!"

He answered, "Here I am, Lord,"

The voice said, "Rise up, and go to the street called Straight and ask at the house of Judas for a man called Saul, of Tarsus, the city where he was born, for this man is praying. And he has seen in a vision a man named Ananias coming in and putting his hand on him, that he might receive his sight."

These tidings surprised Ananias. He could hardly believe what he heard, for he knew of Saul, the great persecutor of believers everywhere. Now he exclaimed, "Lord, I have heard many things about this man, how much evil he has done to those at Jerusalem who believe in Jesus; and even here he has been given power to make prisoners of all the believers he can find."

But God answered, "Go your way as I have commanded; for Saul is a chosen servant of mine to carry my name to the Gentiles and even before kings of the earth, as well as to the Jews. And I will show him how he must suffer great things for my sake."

Ananias was no longer afraid to obey, for he believed the words God had spoken to him. So he rose up at once, and went out to search for Saul. And

when he found the blind visitor in Judas' home he spoke to him kindly, saying, "Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on the road when you were coming to this city, has sent me that you might receive your sight, and receive the Holy Spirit." Then he placed his hands upon Saul, and what seemed to be scales fell from the blinded eyes of the stricken man.

Now Saul could see again, and he rose up to be baptized. He was eager to do the things that would please God, and no longer did he feel hatred in his heart to anyone. His friends brought food to him, and when he ate of it, strength came into his body. Then he went to the synagogues, not to seize the believers in Jesus, but to worship with them. And he began at once to teach those who crowded to see him that Jesus is the Christ, whom God had sent to be the Saviour of men.

Chapter 9

9. Conversion of the apostle to the Gentiles

Verses 1-19. Saul's conversion

Verses 20-25. Damascus and the beginning of Saul's ministry

Verses 26-31. Saul's return to Tarsus

Verses 32-43. Peter prepared for Gentile evangelism

Verses 1-43

- 1. The vision of Glory on the road to Damascus (Acts 9:1-9).*
- 2. Instructions given to Ananias (Acts 9:10-16).*
- 3. Saul filled with the Spirit, is baptized and preaches that Jesus is the Son of God (Acts 9:17-22).*
- 4. Saul persecuted and back in Jerusalem (Acts 9:23-31).*
- 5. Further Acts of Peter (Acts 9:32-43).*

The previous chapter must be looked upon in its main part as a parenthesis. The record now leads us back to the close of the seventh, and the person who was connected with the great tragedy enacted there is prominently brought now before us. The witnesses of the wicked deed had laid down their clothes at a young man's feet, whose name was Saul. This is the first time this remarkable man is mentioned. We also learned that he was consenting unto Stephen's death;

he made havoc of the church and committed men and women to prison. While the scattered believers had carried the Gospel throughout Judea, Philip had gone down to Samaria and with great results preached the Gospel, and during the same time Peter and John preached in the Samaritan villages, Saul carried on his work of persecution. This we learn from the opening verse of the present chapter. "And Saul, yet breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord, went unto the high priest." The conversion of this great persecutor and his call by the risen and glorified lord to be the Apostle to the Gentiles is the event which is next described. It is the greatest event recorded in Acts next to the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost.

Saul was from Tarsus in Cilicia, where he had become acquainted with Greek life, literature, art and philosophy. The chief industry of Tarsus was tent making. This trade the young Saul learned. He had a married sister living in Jerusalem (Acts 23:16). He also was a Roman citizen.

Saul received his religious education in Jerusalem. We find this from his own words, "I am verily a man, a Jew, born in Tarsus, a city in Cilicia, yet brought up in this city (Jerusalem) at the feet of Gamaliel, and taught according to the perfect manner of the law of the fathers, and was zealous toward God, as ye are all this day" (Acts 22:3).

That Saul was highly respected in Jerusalem and close to the leaders of the people, is seen by the letters entrusted to him and the commission to Damascus. He may have been even a member of the council, for "he voted." "When they (Christians) were put to death, I gave my voice (literally, my vote) against them" (Acts 26:10).

And now God's marvellous Grace and Power in salvation is to be manifested. Israel as a nation had rejected the offer and Stephen's death marked the end of that gracious offer. But God can manifest even greater riches of His Grace and display His great Love. Saul not alone belonged to the nation, which had rejected Christ, but shared in that rejection, but he was, so to speak, the heading up of all the hatred and malignity against the Christ of God. He personified the blindness, unbelief and hatred of the whole nation. He was indeed an enemy, the greatest enemy, the chief of sinners. Surely only Grace could save such a one, and Grace it is, which is now to be manifested in the conversion of Saul of Tarsus, the Grace which he was to know first by the vision of the glorified Christ, and which he, ever after, was to proclaim and make known to others.

The vision itself which burst upon Saul on the road to Damascus is one of the greatest in the whole Bible. It has baffled unbelief. Infidels of all descriptions, French rationalists like Renan, reformed rationalistic Jews, and the worst of all,

the advocates of the destructive Bible Criticism, have tried to explain the occurrence in some natural way.

Renan said that it was an uneasy conscience with unstrung nerves, fatigue of the journey, eyes inflamed by the hot sun, a sudden stroke of fever, which produced the hallucination. And this nonsense is repeated to this day. Others of the critics have stated that it was a thunderstorm which overtook him, and that a flash of lightning blinded him. In that lightning flash he imagined that he saw Christ. Again, others have tried to explain his vision by some physical disease. Jews and others have declared that he suffered from Epilepsy, which the Greeks called "the holy disease." This disease, they say, put him into a state of ecstasy, which may have greatly impressed his Gentile hearers. In such an attack he imagined to have seen a vision and heard a voice. All these and other opinions are puerile inventions. The fact is, the conversion of Saul is one of the great miracles and evidences of Christianity.

The ninth chapter does not contain the full record of what happened on the road to Damascus. The Apostle Paul himself relates twice his own experience in chapter 22:5-16 and in chapter 26:12-18. He also mentions his conversion briefly in 1 Corinthians 15:8; Galatians 1:15-16 and 1 Timothy 1:12-13. The three accounts of Saul's conversion are not without meaning. The one before us in the ninth chapter is the briefest, and is simply the historical account of the event as it had to be embodied in the Book of the Acts, as history. The account in the twenty-second chapter was given by Paul in the Hebrew tongue; it is the longest statement and was addressed to the Jews. The account in the twenty-sixth chapter was given in presence of the Roman governor Festus and the Jewish king Agrippa, therefore addressed to both Jews and Gentiles. But are there not discrepancies and disagreements in these three accounts? Such has been the claim from the side of men who reject the inspiration of the Bible. There are differences, but no disagreements. These differences in themselves are the evidences of inspiration. The differences, however, are simply in the manner in which the facts of the event are presented.

He saw then the glorified One and heard His voice. This great vision became the great turning point of his life. He received perfect knowledge and assurance, that the rejected Jesus of Nazareth is the Son of God. The great event is prophetic. It will be repeated on a larger scale when the Lord Jesus comes again and the remnant of Israel sees Him coming in the clouds of heaven.

The words which the Lord addressed to Saul:--"Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou Me?" contain the blessed Gospel he was soon to proclaim. He did not persecute Christ, but those who had believed on Him.

Every believing sinner is a member of the body of Christ. Christ in Glory, the Lord, who spoke to Saul in the way, is the Head of that body, the church. Christ is in each member of His body, His life is there; and every believer is in Christ. “Ye in Me and I in you.” And this great hidden mystery flashes forth in this wonderful event for the first time “Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou Me.” “I am Jesus whom thou persecutest.” The poor, hated, despised Nazarenes, whom the mad, Jewish zealot Saul of Tarsus had driven out of Jerusalem, put into prison and delivered unto death, were one with the Lord in Glory. They were identified with Him and He with them. Their persecution meant His persecution, in their affliction He was afflicted. They were members of His body and that body was in existence.

Soon after we see the erstwhile persecutor preaching Jesus, that He is the Son of God. Persecution soon followed. He also spent a time in Arabia and then paid a visit to Jerusalem for fifteen days (Galatians 1:17-24). Further Acts of Peter by divine power conclude this chapter.



A house built on the ancient wall of Damascus

Chapter 10

10. The Gentiles admitted to gospel privileges

Verses 1-33. Cornelius and Peter

Verses 34-48. Peter's last use of the keys

Verses 1-48

1. *Cornelius of Caesarea and his Preparation* (Acts 10:1-8).
2. *The Trance-vision of Peter* (Acts 10:9-16).
3. *Peter with Cornelius at Caesarea* (Acts 10:17-33).
4. *Peter Preaching to the Gentiles* (Acts 10:34-43).
5. *The Interrupted Message* (Acts 10:44-48).

The ending of the preceding chapter tells us that Peter tarried in Joppa in the house of Simon the tanner. Was he breaking with his Jewish law and customs? Tanning as a trade was considered unclean by the Jews.

In Ephesians 2:11-18 we read of the Grace of God to the Gentiles. Up to this time in the Book of Acts we have seen nothing of this gracious purpose, the blessed result of the finished work of Christ on the cross. Jerusalem heard the Gospel first. Once more the good news of the Kingdom was preached with a full offer of forgiveness to the Jews. God was willing to blot out their transgressions and to make good all He had promised to the nation. Many signs and miracles had been done in Jerusalem in demonstration of the resurrection from the dead of the Prince of Life, whom they had crucified. We have seen how the seventh chapter in this book marks the close of that special offer to Jerusalem. Immediately after the death of Stephen, the Gospel was carried into Judea and Samaria. In Samaria a people heard and accepted the glad tidings. They were a mixed race and practiced circumcision and obeyed parts of the law. In the ninth chapter the conversion of Paul is recorded and the Lord makes known that the persecutor of the church is to be the chosen vessel to bear His name before the Gentiles. Paul, however, was not chosen to open first the door to the Gentiles as such, but Peter, the Apostle of the circumcision. A new work is given him to do, which was indeed a strange work for a Jew. He was to go to the Gentiles, whom the Jews considered unclean. It was unlawful for a Jew to join himself to any Gentile; an insurmountable barrier divided them. For this reason the Jews considered the Gentiles as unclean, common, spoke of them as dogs, and had no

intercourse with them. It is of interest to notice that Peter tarried in Joppa; from this old city he is to be sent forth to preach the Gospel to Cornelius and his household. Centuries ago another Jew had come to Joppa with a solemn message from his God, which he was commissioned to bear far hence to the Gentiles. Jonah, the prophet, took a ship from Joppa and refused obedience to the divine call.

But here is one who is obedient to the heavenly vision and who is to bring a higher message to the Gentiles, the good news of a free and full salvation. That Peter, the Apostle of the circumcision, was chosen for this great errand, was all important hint that the middle wall of partition had been broken down and that believing Jews and Gentiles were to form one new man.

Cornelius belonged to that class of Gentiles who, illumined by the Holy Spirit, had turned to God from idols, to serve the true and the living God. He was therefore a converted man, for God acknowledged him as such. Of salvation through the Lord Jesus Christ and the blessed assurance of that salvation he knew nothing. His prayers had been heard. The angel who appeared gave Cornelius the full directions where Peter was to be found. While the messengers were hastening to Joppa, Peter had his vision.

And what is the meaning of the vision? The vessel is the type of the church. The four corners represent the four corners of the earth. The clean animals it contained, the Jews; the unclean, the Gentiles. But all in that vessel are cleansed. The Grace of God in the Lord Jesus Christ has cleansed those who are in Christ. "But ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but Ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God" (1 Corinthians 6:11). Jew and Gentile believing, redeemed by blood, saved by Grace, washed and sanctified, are to be put into one body.

Then Peter reached Caesarea and preached to Cornelius and those who were gathered together. How different this message from those he delivered in Jerusalem. There are a few introductory remarks followed by a declaration of the facts concerning Jesus of Nazareth. Then he pressed the message home to their hearts. "To Him give all the Prophets witness that through His Name whosoever believeth on Him shall receive remission of sins." This was his last word to the assembled company. It is the first time we find the word "whosoever" in this book. He had nothing to say to this Gentile company about repentance and baptism. His message was interrupted. They believed and the Holy Spirit fell on them.

Something new had taken place. On Pentecost it meant water baptism as a condition of receiving the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38) and the remission of sins; in Samaria the Apostles Peter and John, according to the wisdom of God, had to

lay on hands, but here without water baptism and laying on of hands the Holy Spirit came upon the Gentiles. Nor was there any process of seeking, surrendering, examining themselves, giving up, praying for it, but by hearing of faith, in believing the message of the Gospel the Holy Spirit fell on them. And to show that every barrier between Jew and Gentile had been removed, that nothing inferior had been bestowed upon Gentiles, than that which came upon the believing Jews on the day of Pentecost, Cornelius, his kinsmen and friends spoke with tongues and magnified God. It was the conclusive evidence that Gentiles, uncircumcised and unbaptized, received the Holy Spirit like the Jews.

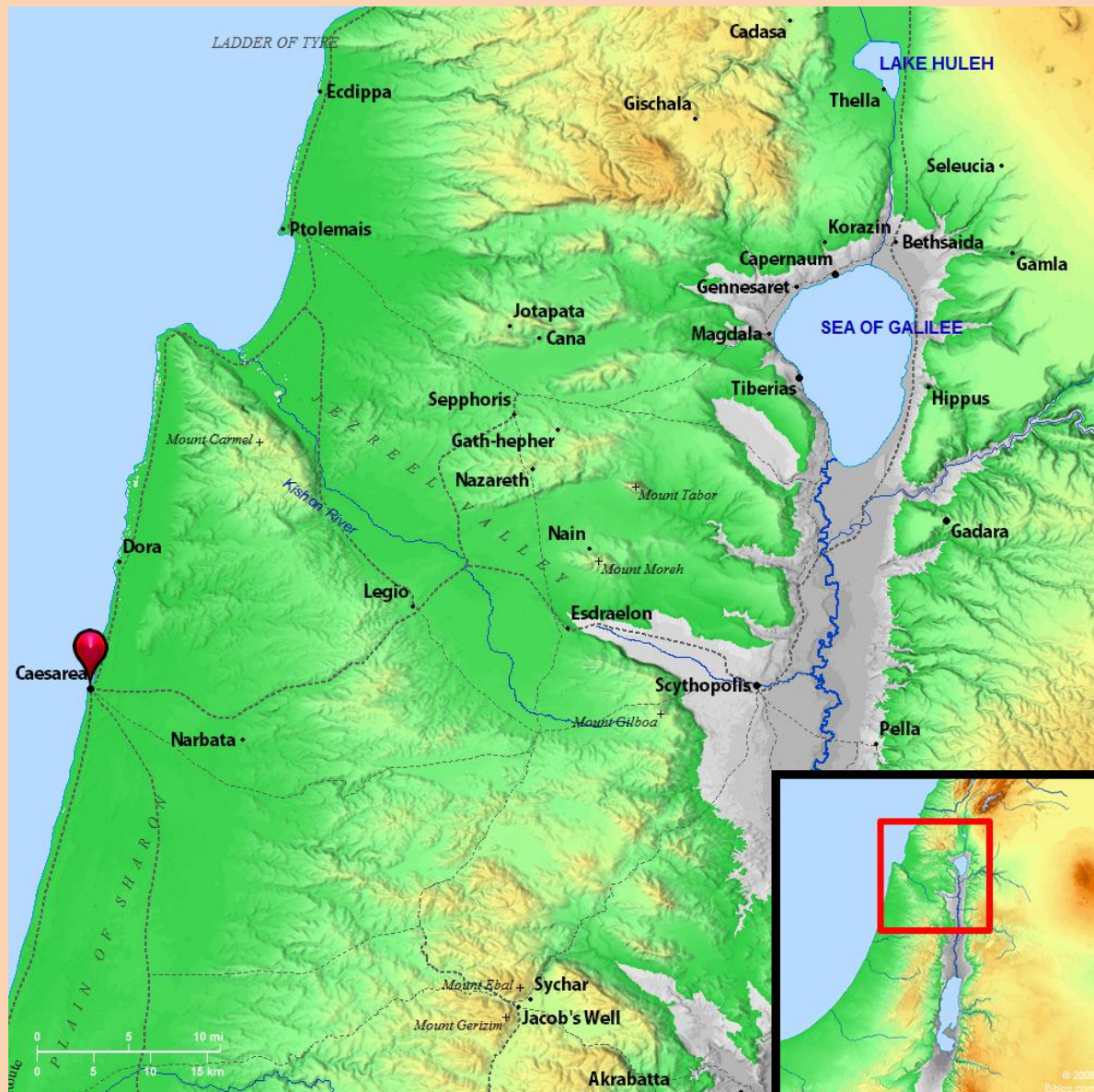
Water baptism follows. Up to this chapter water baptism preceded the gift of the Holy Spirit. This shows the place water baptism holds on the ground of grace. Water baptism has no place in the proclamation of the Gospel of Grace. It is not a means of grace, nor a sacrament. Peter, however, does not slight nor ignore baptism. "Can any man forbid water?" Then he commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord.

Believers' Baptism by Total Immersion

As the name suggests, Baptists and other Evangelical Churches practice the **baptism** of believers. The New Testament teaches that baptism is for those who have come to a **personal** faith in Jesus Christ. For this reason we practice **Believers' Baptism** - that is baptism of those who profess a real faith in the Lord Jesus Christ as their own personal Saviour. And consequently we only baptise those old enough to have a real understanding of the Christian faith - and what Christian commitment means. We baptise by **total immersion** because we are following the example of Jesus and the early church which baptised in this way.

Baptists and other Evangelicals are often criticized for being so insistent on the proper method of administering Baptism. Many people declare that it is not the method but the spirit of the ordinance that pleases God. Some go so far as to say that it is not a question of what the Bible teaches, but rather, what method have the church leaders approved. Baptism by immersion is only valid to fulfil the sacrament of baptism as testimony of our faith in Jesus Christ.

Archaeological light: Caesarea



The ancient name in the Arabic form Qaisariyeh still clings to the ruins on the sea shore, about 30 miles North of Jaffa. It was built by Herod the Great on the site of Strato's Tower (Ant., XIII, xi, 2; XV, ix, 6), and the name Caesarea Sebaste was given it in honour of Augustus (ibid., XVI, v, 1). With his usual magnificence Herod lavished adornments on the city. He erected sumptuous palaces and public buildings, a theatre, and amphitheatre with prospect to the sea; while a spacious system of sewers under the city secured cleanliness and health. But "the greatest and most laborious work of all" was a magnificent harbor "always free from the waves of the sea," which Josephus says was not less than the Piraeus: this however is an exaggeration. It was of excellent workmanship, and all the more remarkable because the place itself was not suitable for such noble structures. The whole coast line, indeed, is singularly ill-fitted for the formation of harbours. The mighty breakwater was constructed by

letting down stones 50 x 18 x 9 ft. in size into twenty fathoms deep. The mole was 200 ft. wide. Part was surmounted by a wall and towers. A promenade and dwellings for mariners were also provided. The work was done in ten or twelve years. It became the residence of the Roman procurator. It passed into the hands of Agrippa I; and here he miserably died (Acts 12:19, 23). Here dwelt Philip the Evangelist (Acts 8:40; Acts 21:8). To Caesarea Peter was sent to minister to the Roman centurion Cornelius (Acts 10). Thrice Paul passed through Caesarea (Acts 9:30; Acts 18:22; Acts 21:8); hither he was sent under guard from Jerusalem to escape danger from the Jews (Acts 23:23); and here he was imprisoned till his final departure for Rome.

Riots between Gentiles and Jews in Caesarea gave rise to the war (BJ, II, xiii, 7; xiv, 4). Terrible cruelties were practiced on the Jews under Felix and Florus. Here Vespasian was hailed emperor by his soldiers. Titus here celebrated the birthday of his brother Domitian by setting 2,500 Jews to fight with beasts in the amphitheater. Eusebius was bishop of Caesarea (313-40 A.D.). In 548 A.D. a massacre of the Christians was organized and carried out by the Jews and Samaritans. The city passed into Moslem hands in 638. In the time of the Crusades it fell, now to the Christians and now to the Moslems; and was finally overthrown by Sultan Bibars in 1265 A.D.

The cathedral stood on the site of a temple built by Herod, where the ruins are seen today; as are also those of two aqueducts which conveyed water from Nahr ez-Zerqa. The landward wall of the Roman city was nearly 3 miles in length.

(2) Caesarea Philippi (fi-lip'-i) (Kaisareia he Philippou).

At the Southwest base of Mt. Hermon, on a rocky terrace, 1,150 ft. above sea-level, between Wady Khashabeh and Wady Za`areh, lie the ruins of the ancient city. It was a centre for the worship of Pan: whence the name Paneas, applied not only to the city, but to the whole district (Ant., XV, x, 3). It is possible that this may have been the site of ancient Baal-hermon; while Principal G. A. Smith would place Daniel here (HGHL, 480). The district was given by Augustus to Herod the Great 20 B.C., by whom a temple of white marble was built in honor of the emperor. Paneas formed part of the tetrarchy of Philip. He rebuilt and beautified the town, calling it Caesarea as a compliment to Augustus, and adding his own name to distinguish it from Caesarea on the coast of Sharon (Ant., XVIII, ii, 1; BJ, II, ix, 1). From Bethsaida Jesus and His disciples came hither, and on the way Peter made his famous confession, after which Jesus began to tell them of His coming passion (Matthew 16:13 Mark 8:27). Some think that on a height near Caesarea Philippi Jesus was transfigured. He renamed the town Neronias (Ant., XX, ix, 4). The ancient name however outlived both Caesarea and Neronias, and survives in the Arabic form Banias. The modern

village, built among the ruins, contains 350 inhabitants. The walls and towers of which the remains are seen date from Crusading times. The castle, ec-Cubeibeh, crowns the hill behind the town, and must have been a place of strength from the earliest times. Its possession must always have been essential to the holding of the valley to the west. Immediately to the north of the town, at the foot of a steep crag, the fountain of the Jordan rises. Formerly the waters issued from a cave, Magharet ras en-Neba`, "cave of the fountain head," now filled up with debris. Two niches cut in the face of the rock recall the idolatries practiced here in olden times. A shrine of el-Khudr stands on the west of the spring. With the rich soil and plentiful supplies of water, in a comparatively temperate climate, average industry might turn the whole district into a garden. As it is, the surroundings are wonderfully beautiful.



The Roman theatre at Caesarea



*Entrance to the Roman theatre
Caesarea*



Caesarea Maritima

Chapter 11

11:1-18. Peter defends his ministry to Gentiles

Verses 1-3. Peter called to explain his ministry to Gentiles

Verses 4-18. Peter's explanation

11:19-30. The church at Antioch

Verses 19-26. The disciples called Christians

Verses 27-30. Relief sent to Jerusalem

Verses 1-30

1. Peter's Defense in Jerusalem (Acts 11:1-18).

2. The Beginning of the Church in Antioch (Acts 11:19-21).

3. *Barnabas sent to Antioch* (Acts 11:22-26).

4. *The Prophecy of Agabus* (Acts 11:27-30).

Peter silenced the objections of his brethren in Jerusalem by a rehearsal of his experience. Acts 11:19 connects with Acts 8:4. Antioch comes now into prominence as the great Gentile center of Christianity. A great number believed and turned unto the Lord. Then Barnabas was sent to Antioch to inspect the great work. They wanted to know in Jerusalem if the reports were true, and if true the assembly had to be recognized as such. This shows that the Oneness of the church, though not yet fully made known by revelation, was nevertheless realized through the Holy Spirit. And that a blessed relationship existed between the assembly in Jerusalem and the one in Antioch, is seen by Peter's visit in that city, when in the liberty wherewith Christ has made us free, he ate with these believing Gentiles and enjoyed fellowship with them (Galatians 2:11-12).

The movement also attracted the attention of the outsiders. They called them "Christians." The Jews, it is certain, did not give this name, but the Gentiles invented it. Antioch was famous for its readiness to jeer and call names; it was known by its witty epigrams. So they coined a new word, "Christianoi"--Christians. It is used exclusively by outsiders, as seen in the case of Agrippa, also see 1 Peter 4:16. Jews and Gentiles alike were called by this name, "Christians," so that it bears testimony to the oneness of Jew and Gentile in Christ.

Speaking in Tongues (Glossolalia)

The phenomenon of "speaking in tongues," technically designated as "Glossolalia," has been manifested in nearly every Christian denomination in recent years. It is estimated that between 140 and 370 million Christians engage in Glossolalia worldwide. These figures reveal that up to 20% of all Christians engage in Glossolalia, and the number is growing dramatically every year.

The contemporary phenomenon of "speaking in tongues" is of recent origin in Christianity. It is part of the Pentecostalism of the twentieth century, beginning in modern times around 1900 and more recently, since the 1960's, involving the charismatic movement.

What is the origin of Glossolalia? Is it from God or, as others claim, connected with the demonic? Is it a supernatural phenomenon or is it a trance-state, a form of hypnosis? Is glossolalia identical with the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost as described in Acts 2? Is it identical with Paul's descriptions of the spiritual gifts in 1 Cor 12-14?

Why do people who "speak in tongues" now refer to it as the "language of angels" whereas they previously said that they spoke in known foreign languages?

Charismatics usually consider "speaking in tongues" as the fulfillment of the Latter Rain as promised in Joel 2:28-29. They believe that glossolalia is a final manifestation of the Holy Spirit in the end of time before the Second Coming of Christ. Many Christians believe that one is not fully "saved" until they have the "gift" of "spiritual language."

This study will analyze the five passages in the New Testament that deal directly and explicitly with "speaking in tongues": Mark 16:17; Acts 2:1-13, 10:44-48; 19:1-7; and 1 Cor 12-14 and will evaluate the published scientific studies regarding the origin of the "languages" spoken by those participating in glossolalia (speaking in tongues).

In Mark 16:17: Jesus predicts the following:

"And these signs will accompany those who have believed: in My name; they will cast out demons, they will speak with new tongues."

This is the only reference to speaking in tongues in the Gospels. This statement by Jesus in Mark on the gift of tongues is in the context of the Lord's commission to His disciples to preach the gospel to the whole world, to every creature. Jesus' disciples were to receive the power of the gift of the Holy Spirit and they were to proclaim the Good News of what Jesus had achieved for all mankind, first in Israel, and then to all nations, tongues (languages) and peoples.

During their previous ministry the disciples had been restricted to Israel, but now their ministry was to go far beyond the borders of Palestine into countries where other languages were spoken.

The most explicit and significant passage on the gift of speaking in tongues is presented in Acts 2:1-13.

"And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance." (Acts 2:4)

The word "gave" denotes a gift of the Holy Spirit. The gift of speaking in tongues is not a learned experience. This is in contrast to the practice in Pentecostalism and among the charismatics with their meetings of groups of people where they are **taught** how to expand their consciousness and bypass the

intellect in order to engage in Glossolalia, speaking in tongues.

The word translated "utterance" in Acts 2:4 actually means "to speak out loudly and clearly" or "to speak with emphasis."

Acts 2:5-12:

"And there were dwelling at Jerusalem Jews, devout men out of every nation under heaven. Now when this sound occurred, the multitude came together and were confused, **because every man heard them speak in his own language** (vernacular).

"And they were all amazed and marvelled, saying one to another, Behold are not all these which speak Galileans? **And how hear we every man in our own language (or dialect) wherein we were born?** Parthians, and Medes, and Elamites, and the dwellers in Mesopotamia and in Judea and Cappadocia, in Pontus, and Asia, Phrygia, and Pamphylia, in Egypt and in the parts of Libya about Cyrene, and visitors of Rome, Jews and proselytes, Cretes and Arabians, **we do hear them speak in our tongues (languages)**, the wonderful works of God. And they were all amazed, and were perplexed, saying one to another, What meaneth this?"

It is obvious that all these people from many different countries were hearing in their own language, the specific language of their nation. The languages in which the disciples were speaking were **known** foreign languages and dialects, not unintelligible mutterings. And the people were amazed that these Galileans, uneducated in the "proper" schools, and all from a lower class of society, could speak these foreign languages.

Luke is communicating to us that the miraculous gift of speaking in other languages at Pentecost was the ability to speak articulate, intelligible, foreign languages which had not been learned by the speakers previously and which were not learned at that time. The gift of languages was instant and spontaneous. It was not "learned."

The term "tongues" in vs. 4 is clearly defined by Luke, the author of the Book of Acts, in Acts 2. In vss. 6 and 8 he equates this term with "languages." In the latter two verses we do not find the Greek word *glossa* but the Greek term *dialektos* which means dialect, or "language of a nation or region." In Acts 1:19 the term *dialektos* means the vernacular language of a country. It has the same meaning in Acts 2:6,8.

There is much support for the conclusion that the "tongues" are indeed specific known "languages." First, notice that the hearers, who are not necessarily

believers, understand in their own individual language, without interpretation or translation. Second, the people are amazed and bewildered (Acts 2:7). "The crowd detects that the speakers are not foreigners but Galileans who could not have learned these foreign languages in any natural way. Their utter amazement was caused by the fact that these unlearned Galileans suddenly spoke in the native mother tongues of the various listeners."

Acts 10:44-48

"While Peter yet spake these words, the Holy Ghost fell on all them that heard the word. And they of the circumcision which believed were astonished, as many as came with Peter, because that on the Gentiles was also poured out the gift of the Holy Ghost.

For they heard them speak with tongues, and magnify God. Then answered Peter, Can any man forbid water, that these should not be baptized, which have received the Holy Ghost as well as we? And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord."

The two manifestations of speaking in other languages (tongues) recorded in Acts 2 and Acts 10 is further stressed by Peter, the eyewitness in Acts 11:15:

"The Holy Spirit fell on them (in Caesarea) just as on us in the beginning." He affirmed that "God gave the same gift to them as he gave to us (at Pentecost) when we believed in the Lord Jesus Christ." (vs 17).

Peter was convinced that the gift of speaking in tongues (languages) by the believers in Caesarea was "the same gift" of miraculously speaking foreign languages as the gift which he and the other followers of Jesus received on the day of Pentecost.

Acts 19:2,3,6

Paul said unto them "Have ye received the Holy Ghost since you believed? And they said unto him, We have not so much as heard whether there be any Holy Ghost.

And he said unto them, Unto what then were ye baptized? And they said, Unto John's baptism...and when Paul laid his hands on them, the Holy Ghost came on them and they spake with tongues and prophesied."

1 Corinthians Chapter 14 (Concordant translation) verses 2-4

"Yet be zealous for spiritual endowments, yet rather that you may be prophesying. For he who is speaking in a language is not speaking to

men, but to God, for no one is hearing, yet in spirit he is speaking secrets...He who is speaking in a language is edifying himself, yet he who is prophesying is edifying the ecclesia."

Verses 12 and 27 say that ALL should be done for the edification of the ecclesia (church). In other words, if edification does not take place as a result of speaking in languages (tongues), the whole process is useless. **The "speaking in tongues" that is occurring in Christian churches today edifies no one.**

History

Glossolalia is defined in the recent authoritative *Encyclopedia of Religion* as a practice of "non-ordinary speech behavior that is institutionalized as a religious ritual in numerous Western and non-Western religious communities." The Greek term *glossa* means "tongue, language," and the verb *laleo* means "to speak", thus the word Glossolalia.

A renowned linguist who has studied Christian glossolalia extensively gave a similar definition, describing it as "a meaningless but phonetically structured human utterance believed by the speaker to be a real language but bearing no systematic resemblance to any natural language, living or dead." (William J. Samarin, *Tongues of Men and Angels*).

Glossolalia is a fairly recent phenomenon in the Christian world: "First wave", 1900: "speaking in tongues" was manifested in the traditional Pentecostal churches. "Second wave", 1960: neo-Pentecostalism or the charismatic renewal movement, "speaking in tongues" entered most traditional churches of Christianity including the Methodists, Presbyterians, Lutherans, Baptists, Roman Catholics and so on. "Third wave": the recent celebration church movement.

Recent studies have indicated that Glossolalia is not a uniquely Christian practice. Glossolalia is practiced by a large number of native non-Christian living religions around the world. Glossolalia is found among the "Inuit (Eskimos), The Saami (Lapps), in Japanese seances in Hokkaido, in a small cult led by Genji Yanagide of Moji City, the shamans in Ethiopia in the zar cult and various spirits in Haitian Voodoo. L. Carlyle May shows that glossolalia in non-Christian religions is present in Malaysia, Indonesia, Siberia, Arctic regions, China, Japan, Korea, Arabia, and Burma, among other places. It is also present extensively in African tribal religions.



A pillar at Kato Paphos, Cyprus, traditionally the place where Paul was beaten. Quite a bit to see in this small area, outside of the archaeological park and just up from the seafront. The Byzantine church of Ayia Kyriaki stands amongst the ruins of an early Christian basilica with attached bishop's palace. Amongst the many columns, standing and fallen, is one dubbed "St. Paul's Pillar". Legend has it that the apostle Paul was tied to the pillar and lashed during a visit to Cyprus. The rest of the ruins are quite picturesque and contain some mosaics (doesn't everywhere?) and the remains of a baths. The church itself is given over to the Anglican and Catholic communities.

Chapter 12

12. Herod's persecution and death

Verses 1-19. Arrest of Peter and his deliverance.

Verses 20-25. Death of Herod at Caesarea

Verses 1-25

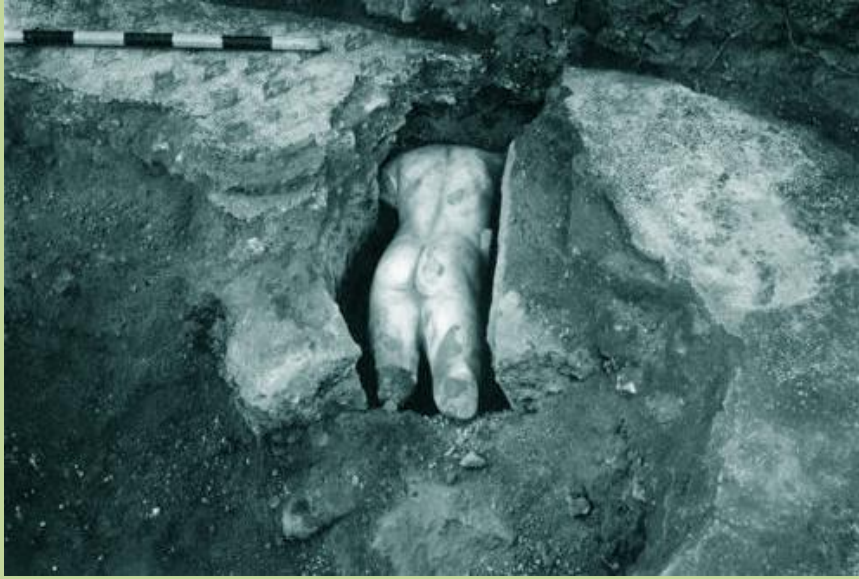
- 1. The great Persecution by Herod Agrippa I (Acts 12:1-5).*
- 2. The miraculous deliverance of Peter (Acts 12:6-17).*
- 3. The Presumption and Judgment of Herod (Acts 12:18-23).*

4. Barnabas and Saul returning to Jerusalem (Acts 12:24-25).

With this chapter we reach the conclusion of the second part of this book. Jerusalem had heard the second offer concerning the Kingdom, and mercy was ready even for the murderers of the Prince of Life. But that offer was rejected. Stephen's testimony followed by his martyrdom marked the close of that second offer to the city where our Lord had been crucified. Then broke out a great persecution, and they were scattered abroad except the Apostles. From our last chapter we learned that others who were driven out of Jerusalem preached the Word in Phenice, Cyprus and Antioch. The twelfth chapter, with which this part of Acts closes, is an interesting one. It is not only interesting on account of the historical information it contains, but also because of its dispensational foreshadowing. Once more we are introduced to Jerusalem and see another great persecution. The wicked King is reigning over the city. James is killed with the sword, while Peter is imprisoned but wonderfully delivered; the evil King, who claimed divine power and worship, is suddenly smitten by the judgment of the Lord. Then the Word grew and multiplied, Barnabas and Saul returned from Jerusalem to Antioch, from where the great missionary operations were soon to be conducted. The events in Jerusalem, James' martyrdom under King Herod, Peter's imprisonment and deliverance, as well as the fate of the persecuting King, foreshadow the events with which this present age will close. After the true church is taken from the earth, that is when 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17 is fulfilled, the great tribulation will take place. While great tribulation and judgment will come upon the whole world, the great tribulation will come upon the Jewish people who have returned in part to their own land. In the midst of the masses of unbelieving Jews, there will be found a remnant of God-fearing Jews, who are converted and bear testimony to the truth. A wicked King, the man of sin, the false Messiah, will then be in power in Jerusalem. Part of that Jewish remnant will suffer martyrdom; these are represented by James, whom Herod, the type of the Antichrist, slew. Another part will be delivered as Peter was delivered. Herod's presumption and fate clearly points to that of the Antichrist (2 Thessalonians 2:3-8). All this may well be kept in mind in the study of this chapter in detail.

Interesting is the account of the prayer meeting held in behalf of Peter. When God had answered their prayers they were reluctant to believe it. Not one of the company believed that Peter had been released. Rhoda was the one who believed that it was Peter. And this is undoubtedly the reason why her name is mentioned in this book. The poor maid, perhaps a slave girl, pleased God because she had faith. While there was great earnestness in that prayer meeting, when the prayer was answered, unbelief manifested itself.

Antioch-on-the-Orontes and Archaeology



Excavations in the House of the Phoenix, a late Roman villa in Daphne (Harbiye), nine kilometres south of Antioch, uncovered a large mosaic-paved courtyard. When the mosaic floor was lifted, this marble male torso was revealed. This finely carved statue had been used, along with rough blocks of stone, to close the opening of a disused well from an earlier structure. The statue is now in the Baltimore Museum of Art; October 19, 1934; Department of Art and Archaeology, Princeton University

In 1928, Charles Rufus Morey, chair of Princeton's Department of Art and Archaeology, proposed the exploration and excavation of the ancient and medieval site of Antioch, located in northern Syria near the Turkish border. Founded in 300 B.C., Antioch was one of the most important political and cultural centers of the Hellenistic East and one of the great metropolises of the Roman Empire. Morey wrote, "To continue the work of Howard Crosby Butler in the archaeological exploration of Syria has of course always been a desire of this Department at Princeton."

Morey's involvement began as early as 1927, when the French Antiquities Service asked if Princeton would be interested in excavating at Antioch. Morey replied, "We have had this project as a dream for some years." He thought that Princeton was the logical choice to direct the excavation of Antioch because the project would be a natural extension of Howard Crosby Butler's expeditions to Syria, and because the Index of Christian Art, which he had founded in 1917, was the institution best equipped to interpret the Early Christian and Byzantine materials that would certainly be found at Antioch.

The opportunity to excavate came in 1930, when the Syrian Antiquities Service

finalized the concession and Princeton was granted the right of excavation for a six-year term, beginning January 1, 1931. Fund raising, including the search for additional subscribers and sponsors, continued throughout 1931. In December of 1931, the Committee for the Excavation of Antioch-on-the-Orontes was formed; its members included the Worcester Art Museum, the Baltimore Museum of Art, the Musées Nationaux de France, and, of course, Princeton, which assumed direction of the expedition and responsibility for the publication of its results.

Fieldwork began on March 4, 1932, under the general direction of George W. Elderkin, Princeton professor of art and archaeology. The staff consisted of Clarence Fisher of the American School of Oriental Research in Jerusalem as field director, William A. Campbell of Wellesley College as assistant field director, and Jean Lassus of the French Institute at Damascus.

Four campaigns were carried out at Antioch and its suburb Daphne between 1933 and 1936. When the original concession expired in July of 1936, the Committee for the Excavation of Antioch asked for a renewal of the concession for the maximum period of six years. The Department of Syrian Antiquities granted this request, and the subscribing institutions extended their support, thereby ensuring the continuation of the excavations. The renewal also granted the right to excavate the port city of Seleucia, where preliminary work began within the city walls in 1937.

The final excavations of the campaign took place in September of 1939. The prevailing sentiment was that time was running out. The earlier sponsors of the dig, still suffering the effects of the Depression, were hesitant to fund excavations. In Europe and in the Middle East war was looming. The most immediate crisis was the secession of Hatay province, where Antioch was located, from Syria to Turkey, a country with strict laws governing the exporting of antiquities. Consequently, the field director William Campbell had a rather difficult time extracting the committee's share of excavated objects, as stipulated in the original concessions negotiated with the Syrian Department of Antiquities. Ultimately the 300 mosaics and all the other finds were divided on a share basis among the various subscribers, including the Turkish government. Work was finally suspended with the outbreak of World War II.



The apostle Paul and Barnabas are considered prophets (teachers) in the early New Testament church like several others. The brethren of Antioch in Syria lay hands on both men and ordain them as apostles in the late Spring of 44 A.D.

While they (the church in Syrian Antioch) were serving the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said to them, 'Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul, to do the work to which I have called them.' (Acts 13)

From Antioch Paul, Barnabas and John (surnamed Mark) begin a missionary journey (Acts 13:4-52, 14:1-25). It is the first such extensive evangelistic tour taken by Paul. The evangelism team travels to Seleucia then sails to Salamis, the principle city and seaport of the island of Cyprus.

Why an island?

Why did Paul choose, as the first place he would evangelize on his initial missionary journey, to travel to the island of Cyprus? While the Bible is silent regarding the exact reasons why Cyprus was chosen, we can understand why it was visited first based on the following facts.

- 1 The island, the third largest in the Mediterranean, was fairly close to the*

mainland. At its closes point Cyprus is only about 63 miles (101 kilometers) from mainland Syria.

- 2 Cyprus' proximity to the mainland made it a good migration destination for Jews, who had probably begun to settle there even before the time of Alexander the Great. When Paul visited he was able to preach the gospel in not just one but several synagogues (Acts 13:5).*
- 3 The island was the home of fellow travelling companion and apostle Barnabas (Acts 4:36). It may have also been a former residence of John Mark, who was a cousin of Barnabas (Colossians 4:10). Paul and company cross the island by foot and arrive at Paphos. While in Paphos the island's Roman governor requests Barnabas and Paul meet with him so that he can personally hear the word of God. Accompanying the governor to the meeting is a sorcerer and false prophet known as Elymas the magician. Elymas resists the gospel and tries to prevent the governor from accepting the truth of God (Acts 13:6-8). Paul perceives Elymas' intentions, intently looks at him, then strikes the magician of the black arts BLIND.*

'You son of the Devil! You are the enemy of everything that is good . . . The Lord's hand will come down on you now; you will be blind and will not see the light of day for a time.'

Part III

The Witness to the Gentiles.

Chapter 13

13:1-12. First tour Cyprus

Verses 1-3. Antioch the birthplace of foreign missions

Verses 4-12. The tour of Cyprus

13: 13-52. First tour – Perga and Pisidian

Verse 13. From Paphos to Perga

Verses 14 to 52. From Perga to Pisidian Antioch and Iconium

The Apostle to the Gentiles; his Ministry and Captivity.

Chapters 13-28

1. *The Divine Choice. Barnabas and Saul separated unto the work* (Acts 13:1-3).
2. *The Beginning of the Journey and the events in Cyprus* (Acts 13:4-12).
3. *The Gospel in Galatia. Paul's Address* (Acts 13:13-41).
4. *The Gospel rejected by the Jews* (Acts 13:42-52).

The thirteenth chapter is the beginning of the third part of this book. The second great center of Christianity comes to the front. It is no longer Jerusalem, but the city of Antioch. The gospel which had been preached in Jerusalem, in Judea and Samaria, which Cornelius and his house had heard and accepted, is now in a special manner to go far hence to the Gentiles. The city in which the first great Gentile church had been established is the starting point. Peter, so prominent in the first twelve chapters of our book, is no longer the leading actor. He is mentioned only once in this second part of the Book of Acts. In the fifteenth chapter, in connection with the council in Jerusalem, his voice is heard once more. The special work in connection with the kingdom of heaven, in opening the door to the Jews and Gentiles (Acts 2:1-47 and chapter 10) had been accomplished by him. Now he disappears from our view, though he continued to exercise his apostleship in connection with the circumcision (Galatians 2:7). Paul, the great Apostle of the Gentiles, instead appears upon the scene, and his wonderful activity is described in the remaining part of the book. The opposition and blindness of the Jews in a continued rejection of the gospel becomes fully evident throughout this section, and the book itself closes with the testimony against them: "Be it known therefore unto you, that the salvation of God is sent unto the Gentiles, and that they will hear it" (Acts 28:28). Besides this we shall find in these chapters the acts of the Holy Spirit in the call and sending forth of the chosen instruments in the way He guided them, how He filled them, opened doors, and manifested His gracious power in the salvation of sinners.

The beginning of the great movement to send now the Gospel far hence to the Gentiles was inaugurated by the Holy Spirit. The assembled prophets and teachers ministered to the Lord in praise and prayer, when the Holy Spirit's voice was heard demanding the separation of Barnabas and Saul unto a work He had called them. The personality of the Holy Spirit is here fully demonstrated. They were thus sent forth not by the church, nor by a missionary society or committee, but by the Holy Spirit.

Accompanied by John Mark as a helper they sailed to Cyprus. Here at Paphos they found a Jew, a sorcerer and false prophet by name of Bar-Jesus (Son Jesus). Such evil persons, special instruments of Satan, appear repeatedly in this book, and generally when the Gospel was carried into some new regions. In Samaria it

was Simon Magus; in Macedonia the damsel with the familiar spirit, and here this demon-possessed Jew. He was an enemy of all righteousness. He tried to keep the Word from the Roman Sergius Paulus. Thus the Jews tried to keep the Gospel from reaching the Gentiles. The judgment which fell upon this wicked Jew is typical of the judicial blindness which has come upon the Jews. But as this sorcerer who opposed the Gospel was not to see the sun for a season, even so, the blindness of the Jews is not permanent.

For the first time, and that in connection with this incident, the name of Paul is mentioned. Some have suggested that he took the name in honor of Sergius Paulus, but that is incorrect. Paul is a Roman name, and means “little.” Later he writes of himself as “less than the least of all saints.” He took the lowest place, and the name which signifies this comes now into prominence. Barnabas is taking the second place; not Barnabas and Saul, but Paul and Barnabas is now the order.

John Mark left them when they had come to Perga in Pamphylia. It was on account of the work (chapter 15:38). It was a failure and for a time he was unprofitable. See 2 Timothy 4:11 where we read of his restoration. He is the one who wrote the Gospel of the obedient servant, the Gospel of Mark.

In Acts 13:16-41 Paul’s great address in Antioch of Pisidia is reported. Then the Jews rejected the Gospel, and when they preached to the Gentiles they contradicted and blasphemed.

| Gospel Outreach | | | | | |
|------------------------|----------------------------|------------------------------|--|------------------------------|--|
| Acts 1-12 | Centre Jerusalem | Chief Person Peter | Gospel to Judea and Samaria | Evangelism Jewish | |
| Acts 13-28 | Centre Antioch | Chief Person Paul | Gospel to The end of the earth | Evangelism Gentile | |

Chapter 14

14. First tour – Iconium, Derbe, Lystra

Verses 1-5. Iconium

Verses 6-19. The work at Lystra

Verses 20-28. Work at Derbe and the return to Antioch of Syria

Verses 1-28

1. *The work in Iconium and the persecution of the Apostles (Acts 14:1-6).*
2. *In Derbe and Lystra; the Impotent Man healed (Acts 14:7-18).*
3. *The Stoning of Paul and further ministries (Acts 14:19-24).*
4. *The Return to Antioch (Acts 14:25-28).*

Iconium was a Phrygian town, bordering on Lycaonia. Here again the unbelieving Jews stirred up the Gentiles. They abode there a long time, and in spite of opposition and persecution they spoke with much boldness the Word of God. Signs and wonders were also done by their hands. When their lives were threatened by the unbelieving Jews and Gentiles, they fled to Lystra and Derbe.

Derbe was the home of a pious Jewess by name of Eunice. She had married a Greek, who had died. Her son was Timotheus and she lived with her mother Lois (Acts 16:1-3; 2 Timothy 1:5). In Lystra another lame man is healed by the power of God. The ignorant heathen, seeing the miracle, thought the two apostles were gods and attempted to worship them. They abhorred their proceedings and refused the honour of men.

The enemy lurked behind this, no doubt, but the grace of God gave to the apostles the power to act as they did. How much of such idolizing is going on in modern days; how men, professedly the servants of the Lord, seek and love the honour and praise of men, is too evident to be mentioned. Seeking honour from men and having delight in the applause of the “religious world” is a deadly thing, for it dishonours Christ, to whom all honour and glory is due. And how much of all this there is in the present day! It is but the result of not giving the Lord Jesus Christ the pre-eminence.

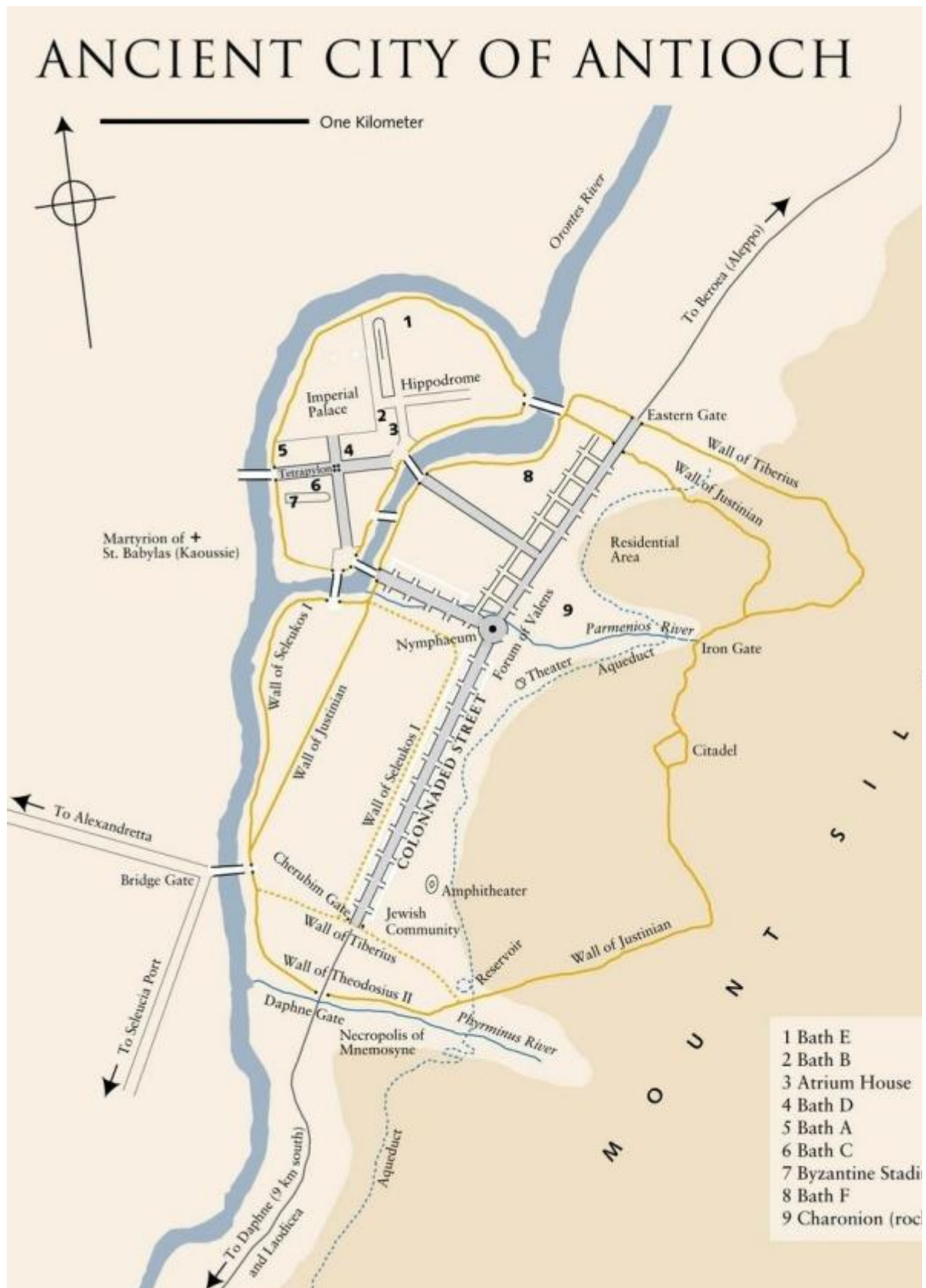
Jews then appeared coming from Iconium and Antioch and stirred up the people against them. The mass of people who were ready to worship Barnabas and Paul changed quickly and stoned Paul. Most likely the fury turned against him

because he had been instrumental in healing the crippled man. As the stones fell upon him, must he not have remembered Stephen? And may he not have prayed as Stephen did? And after they thought him dead, they dragged his body out of the city. But the Lord, who had announced such suffering for him, had watched over his servant. He was in His own hands, as every child of God is in His care. The enemy who stood behind the furious mob, as he stood behind the attempt to sacrifice unto them, would have killed Paul. But he could not touch Paul's life, as he was not Permitted to touch the life of another servant of God, Job (Job 2:6). His sudden recovery was supernatural. He refers in 2 Corinthians 11:25 to this stoning, "Once I was stoned." Another reference to Lystra we find in his second Epistle to Timothy: "Persecutions, afflictions, which came unto me at Antioch, at Iconium, at Lystra, what persecutions I endured; but out of them all the Lord delivered me" (2 Timothy 3:11). Blessed be His name, He is the same Lord still and Will deliver them that trust in Him.

Then after additional testimony in Lystra and a visit to Iconium and Antioch in Pisidia, to build up the disciples and to strengthen them, they terminate this first great journey by returning to the place from which they had started.

Maps of Cyprus and Ancient City of Antioch





Of the sixteen ancient cities in Turkey named Antioch, only two are of any significance to Bible students today: one is Antakya (Antioch of Syria; Antioch on the Orontes) and the other is Antioch of Pisidia (Pisidian Antioch). Both

cities played a major part in the early days of the church. Around 50 A.D., Paul visited Antioch of Pisidia on his first evangelistic journey (Acts 13:13-14) and his first recorded sermon was preached there (Acts 13:15-51).

History of Antioch of Pisidia

Antioch of Pisidia is located one-half mile north of the village of Yalvac in the Isparta province in southern Turkey.

After the death of Alexander the Great, Seleucus I Nicator, founder of the Seleucid Dynasty, took control of Pisidia (c. 330-280 B.C.). Seleucus I Nicator founded nearly 60 cities, and 16 of them were named in honor of his father Antiochus (Antiochos). The cities he captured were soon Hellenized and fortified cities were built at strategically important places. Judging from coins minted around that time the city must have been economically prosperous.

In 188 B.C., the Romans defeated Antiochus III and declared Antioch of Pisidia a free city. In 25 B.C. the Emperor Augustus made Antioch in Pisidia a Roman colony, gave it the title of *Colonia Caesarea Antiochia*, and placed the area under direct Roman control, creating the Roman province of Galatia that encompassed much of central Asia Minor. As a Roman colony, veterans of the Roman army settled Antioch of Pisidia in their retirement. Paul's letter to the Galatians would have been directed to the Christians in Antioch of Pisidia, Iconium, Lystra and Derbe. By the middle of the first century A.D., several members of the imperial household had served as magistrates here. In 295 A.D., Antioch became the capital of Pisidia, a new Roman province created by the Emperor Diocletian.

The first excavations of Antioch of Pisidia were carried out here in 1913-14 and 1924 by archaeologists William Ramsay and D. M. Robinson. Excavations at Antioch were resumed in 1979 and revealed the remains of many important buildings dating from the Roman era and later. One of these finds was the foundation of the city portal built as a monument commemorating the victory of the Roman emperor Septimius Severus over the Parthians.

At the highest point of the city, Emperor Augustus built the Augustus Temple that was dedicated to the mother goddess Cybele (Kybele). The front of the temple had a stairway of twelve steps leading up to the porch. This building was used as an "open air church" around 400 A.D. A fourth century Byzantine church building, a basilica dedicated to Paul, stands on the west side of the city and was its largest church building. At the time it was built, it was one of the largest church buildings in the world; it is still one of the largest ever discovered in Asia Minor. Most of the walls have disappeared, but the mosaics and inscriptions that cover the floor are worth seeing. At the lower left corner of the

basilica are the remnants of what is believed to be a first century synagogue. Antiochus III ordered 2,000 Jewish families be moved from Babylonia to certain areas in Lydia and Phrygia because he believed they would be loyal supporters of the Seleucids (Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*). A mosaic floor in the church building has been found with Psalm 42:4 inscribed on it.

If you visit the city today you can see the remains of several other important buildings, including:

- The foundations of a 26-foot wide triumphal arch, the Triple Gate, a gateway built in the second century A.D. and dedicated by Emperor Hadrian in 129 A.D.
- The city walls-some sections date to the Hellenistic, Roman, and Byzantine periods.
- The Decumanus Maximus (the major north-south street) leads from the Triple Gate to the intersection with the east-west Cardo Maximus.
- A theater was built during the Hellenistic period and later expanded by the Romans. The theatre could hold between 12,000 and 15,000 persons seated on some 26 rows of seats. This theater was in existence when Paul visited the city.
- The Cardo Maximus (the major east-west street). Some of the columns along the left (north) side of the street are still standing. Numerous shops lined the street and are still visible today. As you walk on the road you will see carvings of garlanded bull's heads among the ruins-the bull was the symbol of the Hellenistic moon goddess Men.
- A Roman bath, dating back to the first century A.D.

North of the city are the massive remains of a Roman aqueduct that brought fresh water from springs in the Sultan Mountains about 6 miles from Antioch. The aqueduct terminated at the nymphaeum, a monumental fountain from which water was distributed to the whole city. Over 3000 cubic meters of water were distributed every day.

Antioch of Pisidia was definitely "off the beaten path" in Paul's day (as well as now), so you might wonder why Paul visited the city. Just before his visit at Antioch of Pisidia, Paul had preached on the island of Cyprus and met Sergius Paulus at Paphos (Acts 13:6-7). After Paul's confrontation with Elymas the sorcerer, Sergius Paulus "believed, when he saw what had been done, being astonished at the teaching of the Lord" (Acts 13:12).

There is an inscription displayed in the Yalvac museum that clearly shows the whole word of "Paulli" and portions of "Sergii." "The family of Sergii Paulli had large estates in the vicinity of Pisidian Antioch. Please note, that on Paul's first journey, on the island of Cyprus, the proconsul, Sergius Paulus (Acts 13:7-12)

was converted to Christianity. It may have been that at that time Sergius Paulus requested Paul to travel to Pisidian Antioch to speak to other members of his extended family that resided there-maybe even giving him a letter of introduction. This, and other inscriptions, strongly hint at the possibility of this type of connection-indeed, even providing a reason as to why Paul traveled to this city." (Dr. Carl Rasmussen, Holy Land Photos).

Paul's Sermon At Antioch

After leaving Perga on his first missionary journey (Acts 13:14), Paul and Barnabas would have followed the *Via Sebaste* into Antioch of Pisidia (a journey of about 110 miles). Paul's first recorded sermon was preached at Antioch of Pisidia.

"Arriving at Pisidian Antioch, Paul and Barnabas entered the synagogue on the Sabbath. A typical first-century synagogue service would have included the *shema*, the liturgy of 'The Eighteen Benedictions,' a reading from the Law, a reading from one of the prophets, a free address given by any competent Jew in attendance, and a closing blessing. The leader of the synagogue, usually one of the elders of the congregation, took charge of the building and made arrangements for the services (Lk 8:41, 49). This office was sometimes held for life and passed on within a family. Perhaps Paul's dress proclaimed him a Pharisee and thereby opened the way for an invitation to speak." (*Zondervan NIV Bible Commentary*).

As with Stephen's speech (Acts 7:2-53), Paul's sermon was a summary of Jewish history and belief (Acts 13:15-41), the main points being:

- God is the God of the people of Israel
- God chose the patriarchs for Himself
- God redeemed His people from Egypt, leading them through the desert
- God gave them the land of Palestine as an inheritance

Paul ended his sermon with a call to repentance, based on Habakkuk 1:5. He warned the congregation that Habakkuk's words applied to all who reject Jesus as the Messiah. "So when the Jews went out of the synagogue, the Gentiles begged that these words might be preached to them the next Sabbath" (Acts 13:42). As Paul and Barnabas saw it, the Jews in Antioch of Pisidia had rejected the very thing they were looking for, i.e., "eternal life" (Acts 13:43-51).

"Having been expelled from Pisidian Antioch, Paul and Barnabas 'shook the dust from their feet in protest against them'-a Jewish gesture of scorn and disassociation, which was directed at the city's magistrates and the Jewish leaders. Then they went southeast on the *Via Sebaste*, heading for Iconium some

eighty miles away. The new 'disciples' left behind at Pisidian Antioch, far from being discouraged at this turn of events, were 'filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit.'" (Zondervan NIV Bible Commentary).

Conclusion

Paul may have visited the Antioch again on his second evangelistic journey, but only Derbe and Lystra are mentioned (Acts 16:1). Paul visited Galatia and Phrygia on this third missionary journey (Acts 18:23). The only other time Paul refers to Pisidian Antioch is in 2 Timothy 3:11, where he mentions an unpleasant incident in the city.



Iconium, Lystra and Derbe

Chapter 15

15:1-35. The Council at Jerusalem

Verses 1-12. The council and the issue

Verses 13-35. The council and the decision

15: 36-16:11. Second tour – Asia Minor and the call to Europe

15:36-41. Paul and Barnabas separate

Verses 1-41

- 1. The false teachers from Judea. Paul and Barnabas sent to Jerusalem (Acts 15:1-5).*
- 2. The Council in Jerusalem (Acts 15:6-21).*
- 3. The Result made known (Acts 15:22-29).*
- 4. The Consolation brought to Antioch (Acts 15:30-35).*
- 5. Paul and Barnabas separate (Acts 15:36-41).*

A very critical time had now arrived for the church. An important question had to be settled. That Gentiles can be saved and salvation must be extended to the Gentiles had been fully demonstrated. The Apostle of the circumcision, Peter, had been used to preach the Gospel to a company of God-fearing Gentiles. Evangelists had gone to Antioch and the great Gentile center had there been founded. Paul and Barnabas had completed their great missionary journey and numerous assemblies of Gentiles, saved by Grace, were formed. The question of the salvation of Gentiles could no longer be raised. But we remember from the eleventh chapter of this book, that when Peter returned to Jerusalem, they that were of the circumcision contended with him. They objected to Peter going to men uncircumcised and eating with them. But those of the circumcision had not been fully satisfied with the status of the believing Gentiles. What about circumcision in their case? Should they not also keep the Law? In other words, the question of the relation of the believing Gentile to the Law and to circumcision had to be determined.

These teachers which taught that Gentiles, in order to be saved, had to be circumcised after the manner of Moses, disturbed greatly the church in Antioch. Paul and Barnabas with others were therefore delegated to go with this question to Jerusalem. Galatians 2:1-10 must be carefully read for interesting and

additional information. The question was settled in favor of the Gospel Paul had preached. James declared: "Wherefore my sentence is, that we trouble not them, which from among the Gentiles are turned to God." They were to abstain from pollution of idols, from fornication, from things strangled and from blood. Of great importance are the words which James uttered by inspiration at this occasion. It was the first church-council, and here the Holy Spirit revealed God's gracious purposes concerning the age that is and the age to come.

Note in Acts 15:14-18 the four important steps: 1. God visits the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for His Name. This is the purpose of the present age. The called people constitute the church, the body of Christ. 2. After this I will return. This means the second Coming of Christ. When the Church is completed and all the members added to that body, Christ comes again, first, as subsequently revealed, for His saints and then with them. 3. The Restoration of Israel follows after His Return. The Tabernacle of David will be built again and will be set up. 4. Then all the Gentiles will seek after the Lord. This is the world-conversion. How strange that this divinely revealed program should be entirely ignored by all church-councils at the present time.

Then after the results of the council and the decision concerning the Gentiles had been made known by a letter, Antioch received consolation.

The beginning of the second missionary journey of Paul is described in the closing paragraph of this chapter. We read nothing of prayer or waiting on God for guidance. Paul said to Barnabas, "Let us go again." He wanted to go over the same territory. This was not the plan of the Spirit. Failure follows on account of self-will and self-choosing. Paul and Barnabas separate on account of John Mark. Barnabas took Mark and Paul chose Silas.

Importance of the First Church Council

The council of Jerusalem was important in that it safeguarded the truth of the Gospel from deterioration into legalistic keeping of the Law. Such would have detracted from the clear Gospel truth of salvation alone through believing in the blood of Jesus Christ on the cross, and returned to a works-based system. The full details of the reasons for the council being called and proceedings and the judgment are in Acts chapter 15.

Here is the text of the letter that was sent out from the council:

Acts 15:23-29 (King James Version) 23.... The apostles and elders and brethren send greeting unto the brethren which are of the Gentiles in Antioch and Syria

and Cilicia. 24 Forasmuch as we have heard, that certain which went out from us have troubled you with words, subverting your souls, saying, Ye must be circumcised, and keep the law: to whom we gave no such commandment: 25 It seemed good unto us, being assembled with one accord, to send chosen men unto you with our beloved Barnabas and Paul, 26 Men that have hazarded their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. 27 We have sent therefore Judas and Silas, who shall also tell you the same things by mouth. 28 For it seemed good to the Holy Ghost, and to us, to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things; 29 That ye abstain from meats offered to idols, and from blood, and from things strangled, and from fornication: from which if ye keep yourselves, ye shall do well. Fare ye well.

First Church Council at Length

The most famous council of the early Christian Church is probably the Council of Nicaea, which took place in AD 325 in the city of Nicaea, located just south of Constantinople, or modern-day Istanbul, Turkey. At the Council of Nicaea, Christian leaders from all over the Roman Empire convened in order to discuss, among other things, doctrinal issues related to the controversial teachings of Arius, a presbyter or local leader from Alexandria, Egypt. Much of the discussion centred on the views of Arius concerning the nature of Christ as well as the Saviour's precise relationship to the other members of the Godhead: God the Father and the Holy Ghost. This conference resulted in the formulation and distribution of the Nicene Creed. Despite the declarations of the leaders of the Church at that time, doctrinal controversies relating to the teachings of Arius persisted.

The Council of Nicaea, however, was not the first council of the Christian Church. Roughly two decades after the crucifixion of the Saviour, leaders of the Church met in Jerusalem to discuss issues relating to the law of Moses, Gentile conversion, and the obligations of faithful members of the Church of Jesus Christ. This council also resulted in the formulation and distribution of important documents—letters announcing the decisions of the council (see Acts 15:23–31). Significantly, even after the leaders of the Church made certain decisions at this conference, questions remained unanswered.

This paper will analyze the Jerusalem Conference. First, I will outline the attitudes toward the law of Moses and Gentiles that led up to the council. Then I will discuss factors of the early Christian proselytizing of Gentiles. Finally, I will investigate the decisions made by the leaders of the Church at this council and their effect upon the remainder of the members of the Church. The leaders were inspired in their council regarding the law of Moses, but followers of Christ still struggled to maintain the proper balance between the doctrine of the

Church and the traditions of the Jewish Saints.

The Law of Moses

Jesus Christ is the Lord Jehovah of the Old Testament. Comparing Church members in his own day with the children of Israel, the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews similarly explained, “For unto us was the gospel preached, as well as unto them” (Hebrews 4:2). Jehovah clearly told Moses that the purpose for the escape of the children of Israel from Egypt was “that they may serve me in the wilderness” (Exodus 7:16; see also Exodus 8:1, 20; 9:1, 13; 10:3). This means that the Lord’s original intent was that the Israelites would serve him by receiving and living the fullness of the gospel.

Eventually the Lord gave to Moses two tablets of stone (see Exodus 31:18), upon which was inscribed the gospel. But when Moses descended from Mount Sinai with the tablets, he found the children of Israel rebelling against the teachings they had received, and in his anger Moses broke the original tablets (see Exodus 32:19). When Moses asked Jehovah for another set of tablets, the Lord agreed, but then explained to Moses: “But it shall not be according to the first, for I will take away the priesthood out of their midst; therefore my holy order, and the ordinances thereof, shall not go before them”. Thus the first set of tablets contained the gospel of Jesus Christ, including the higher priesthood and ordinances, while the second set contained the law of Moses, which was to be administered by the lower priesthood.

Though it was the lower law, the law of Moses was nonetheless a binding covenant and an inspired set of commandments written by “the finger of God” (see Exodus 31:18; Deuteronomy 9:10) and given by Jehovah to the children of Israel to teach them about Christ and his gospel. By the time of the New Testament, the importance of the law of Moses was well established among the Jews living in Judaea and Galilee, though at times it was taken by some to the extreme as oral traditions were multiplied and sometimes amplified beyond the original intent of the original law (see Matthew 15:1–6). The seriousness with which many Jews treated the law of Moses is demonstrated in the Gospels by the multiple occasions when groups of Jewish leaders accused Jesus of breaking that law (see Matthew 12:1–2; John 7:49).

It is important to note that during his mortal life, though he did not agree with the oral traditions that Jewish teachers had created over the centuries, Jesus fully supported keeping the actual written law of Moses. For example, the Saviour declared to a man he had just healed from leprosy: “Go thy way, shew thyself to the priest, and offer for thy cleansing those things which Moses commanded” (Mark 1:44). Further, in his Sermon on the Mount, Jesus declared,

“Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven: but whosoever shall do and teach them, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 5:19). The Saviour’s own attitude toward the law of Moses had a great effect upon the outlook of the disciples concerning the Mosaic regulations.

Gentiles and the Law

The law of Moses contains certain teachings concerning the relationships between Israelites and non-Israelites. Although Jehovah had strictly charged the children of Israel to avoid worshipping any foreign deities (see Exodus 20:3–5), they were also directed to refrain from mistreating non-Israelites: “Thou shalt not oppress a stranger: for ye know the heart of a stranger, seeing ye were strangers in the land of Egypt” (Exodus 23:9). The Lord declared, however, that Gentiles should not eat of the Passover meal unless the males were circumcised (see Exodus 12:43–48). Further, non-Israelites were forbidden to partake of any priestly sacrificial meals (see Exodus 29:31–33; Leviticus 22:10). But, overall, Israelites were to treat non-Israelites with respect and compassion.

The law of Moses did not forbid association between Israelites and non-Israelites. Following the Babylonian captivity, however, Jewish attitudes toward non-Jews became increasingly sceptical and exclusive, presumably to prevent the kind of foreign religious influences that led to the exile in the first place. For example, a Jewish document entitled Ecclesiasticus, a book of the Apocrypha written around 200 BC, declares, “Receive strangers into your home and they will stir up trouble for you, and will make you a stranger to your own family” (Ecclesiasticus 11:34). Similarly, the Jewish book of Jubilees—probably written in the second century BC—states: “Separate yourself from the gentiles, and do not eat with them, and do not perform deeds like theirs. And do not become associates of theirs. Because their deeds are defiled, and all of their ways are contaminated, and despicable, and abominable” (Jubilees 22:16). By the time of the New Testament, these kinds of negative attitudes toward contact with Gentiles were common in Jerusalem.

When Jesus Christ commissioned his Twelve Apostles, he commanded them, “Go not into the way of the Gentiles” (Matthew 10:5). The Saviour, however, never intended the disciples to permanently withhold the gospel from Gentiles, but was informing them that they were not to teach them *at that time*. Earlier, Jesus had prophesied to a group of Jews in Galilee concerning the faith of a Roman centurion: “Many shall come from the east and west, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 8:11). During his mortal ministry, in spite of the temporary prohibition he gave his disciples, the Saviour himself blessed the lives of Gentiles (see Matthew

8:5–13; 15:21–28). The inability of some early disciples to accept new revelation concerning the Gentiles, however, would fracture the young Church.

Early Apostolic Mission

According to the Gospel of Matthew, the resurrected Lord declared to his disciples: “Go ye therefore, and teach *all nations*, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost” (Matthew 28:19; emphasis added; see also Mark 16:15–16). Following the forty-day ministry, the Saviour reminded them, “Ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto *the uttermost part of the earth*” (Acts 1:8; emphasis added). Possibly because there were Jewish communities scattered all over the Roman world, however, the early disciples did not seem to fully appreciate the significance and scope of the Saviour’s declarations until later.

For the earliest Christians, the first opportunities for missionary work were with groups of Jews in and around Jerusalem. These Jewish audiences were taught that Jesus of Nazareth was the true Messiah, was crucified for the sins of the world, and had been resurrected (see Acts 2:21–36; 3:13–26). The precise teachings of these early missionaries about the law of Moses, however, are not as clear. What is clear is that they stirred up controversy. Stephen, for example, was accused of teaching “blasphemous words” concerning the temple and the law of Moses (see Acts 6:11, 13). His accusers stated: “We have heard him say, that this Jesus of Nazareth shall destroy this place [i.e. the temple], and shall change the customs which Moses delivered us” (Acts 6:14). The future tense of the verbs (i.e. “shall destroy” and “shall change”) may indicate that some early disciples, including Stephen, misunderstood the divine timetable in the process of fulfilling the law, supposing that the law of Moses was to be fulfilled at the destruction of the temple, rather than at the death of the Saviour. Thus, many of the earliest Jewish Christians were not prepared to allow non-Jewish converts to refrain from the requirements of the law of Moses.

The Council Proceedings

While Paul and Barnabas were in Asia Minor on their first mission, they experienced some success among groups of non-Jews (see Acts 13:7, 42, 48; 14:1, 21–23). When they returned to their headquarters in Antioch of Syria, Paul and Barnabas testified that God “had opened the door of faith unto the Gentiles” (Acts 14:27). While in Antioch, groups of Jewish Christians visiting from Judea were teaching the false doctrine, “Except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses, ye cannot be saved” (Acts 15:1). Paul and Barnabas “had no small dissension and disputation with them” (Acts 15:2). After Paul received “revelation” on the matter (Galatians 2:2), he and the Christians in Antioch

were convinced that he “should go up to Jerusalem unto the apostles and elders about this question” (Acts 15:2).

In about AD 49 or 50, Paul and Barnabas travelled from Antioch to Jerusalem to meet with other leaders of the Church concerning whether Gentile converts should be compelled to keep the law of Moses. Along the way, Paul and Barnabas met with groups of Christians and were favourably received when they preached about “the conversion of the Gentiles” (Acts 15:3). Paul brought with him a new Gentile convert by the name of Titus, who had joined the Church but had not undergone circumcision (Galatians 2:1–3). Titus seems to have been brought along to encourage the leaders of the Church to make a firm decision on the matter: here was an uncircumcised Gentile Christian—how would Peter and the Jewish Christians in Jerusalem respond toward him?

The council was attended by a number of those who “were of reputation” within the Church at Jerusalem (Galatians 2:2), including “apostles and elders” (Acts 15:4). Paul and Barnabas were the first to speak, and they shared with the audience the success they had experienced among the Gentiles during their mission (see Acts 15:4). In his letter to the Galatians, Paul indicated that the Church leaders in attendance at this meeting recognized the inspiration of his mission to the Gentiles (see Galatians 2:7). Jewish Christians who had been Pharisees, however, interjected that “it was needful to circumcise them, and to command them to keep the law of Moses” (Acts 15:5). The leaders at the council discussed the issue with no immediate resolution (see Acts 15:6–7).

Peter, who was the leader of the Church, arose and reminded those who were present of his revelation concerning Gentiles and the prophetic interpretation of his dream—that God “put no difference between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith” (Acts 15:9). He then bore his witness that “through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved, even as they” (Acts 15:11). Peter likened the requirement to keep the regulations of the law of Moses unto a burdensome “yoke upon the neck of the disciples, which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear” (Acts 15:10). Following this, Paul and Barnabas addressed the audience a second time and reinforced Peter’s declaration by recounting the “miracles and wonders God had wrought among the Gentiles by them” (Acts 15:12).

The final speaker at the meeting was James, the brother of Jesus. By the time of the Jerusalem Council, Paul recognized James as one of the “pillars” (Galatians 2:9) or leaders of the Church alongside Peter and John. While Peter was the overall leader of the early Church, James seems to have been functioning as the local leader of the branch of Jewish Christians in Jerusalem. James acknowledged Peter’s experiences concerning the Gentiles and declared that

they fulfilled Amos's prophecy that non-Israelites would seek after the truth of the Lord (compare Acts 15:16–17 with Amos 9:11–12). Thus, following the testimonies of Paul, Barnabas, Peter, and James, the stage was set for the important verdict.

The Decision of the Council

After the leaders had discussed their views on the matter, James announced the decision of the council. One might have expected Peter, the chief Apostle and leader of the entire Church, to be the one to make the announcement. But recall that Peter's reputation had suffered because of his association with Cornelius and other Gentiles at Caesarea (see Acts 11:1–4). In addition, James was the leader of the Jerusalem branch, many of whom seem to have been in attendance (see Acts 15:4, 22). Therefore, James was the logical choice to deliver the decision of the council. It is likely that the Jewish Christians would be more willing to accept whatever verdict was given if it came from their own respected leader.

James charged the Jewish Christians to “trouble not them, which from among the Gentiles are turned to God” (Acts 15:19). This first expression may have initially sounded like a complete victory for the Gentile Christians—freedom from all the requirements of the law of Moses. But then James clarified the decision, stating that Gentiles should “abstain from pollutions of idols, and from fornication, and from things strangled, and from blood” (Acts 15:20). These rules are not just random moral obligations—they are all regulations from the law of Moses.

The term “fornication” is a translation of the Greek word *porneia*. It is used in the Septuagint—or Greek version—of Leviticus 18:6–18 to describe various types of prohibited sexual unions. The other three prohibitions are from Leviticus 17:8–15 and describe requirements for non-Israelites who were living among Israelites. Such individuals were required to worship the Lord Jehovah rather than false idols (see Leviticus 17:8–9), abstain from eating animals that had not been properly or ritually prepared and drained of their blood (i.e. “strangled”) (see Leviticus 17:13–15), and refrain from ingesting animal blood (see Leviticus 17:10–12). According to Paul, the leaders in Jerusalem also asked Paul “to remember the poor” (Galatians 2:10), which, Paul affirmed, he was already eager to do. Both Paul and Barnabas had already been active in gathering assistance for those in need at Jerusalem (see Acts 11:29–30).

Thus, while Gentile Christians were not forced to submit to circumcision, they were expected to keep four regulations from the law of Moses. This is important because it is sometimes thought that the law of Moses was

completely rescinded, but such is not the case. The decision of the leaders at the Jerusalem Conference was ratified by the Holy Ghost (see Acts 15:28), but it was, in essence, a concession. The Jewish Christians, on the one hand, wanted the Gentile members to be required to keep the entire law of Moses. The Gentile Christians, on the other hand, desired complete freedom from Mosaic regulations, especially circumcision. The leaders settled upon an inspired solution which, they hoped, would appease both sides.

The limited scope of this concession, however, is sometimes overlooked. While Gentile converts would not be required to undergo circumcision or keep all aspects of the Mosaic law, it is important to note that the council made no declaration concerning whether or not Jewish Christians needed to continue keeping the law of Moses. This compromise permitted the Jewish Church members to maintain their previous practice of following the Mosaic regulations if they desired. In fact, there is evidence in the Book of Acts that Jewish Christians continued to keep aspects of the law of Moses well after the Jerusalem Council. The decision at the conference addressed only the relationship of Gentile Christians—not Jewish Christians—to the Mosaic law. Since Peter knew that the law of Moses was not necessary for salvation—for either Jew or Gentile—why did the Church leaders not come down more firmly on this important issue? Why did they not simply declare the truth and let the consequences follow? Suggested a number of possibilities: “Perhaps they hoped to avoid dividing the Church and alienating the strict Jewish members. Likewise, they would not have wanted to invite persecution from non-member Jews. . . . By wording the decision the way they did, the Brethren probably avoided a schism in the Church and no doubt also the ire that would have come from the Jews had the decision been stronger. There must have been many who preferred a stronger declaration, but the Brethren acted in the wisdom requisite for their situation.”

In order to inform the general membership of the Church of the council’s decision, the leaders composed a letter contradicting the previous teachings of the Jewish Christians and announcing the new policy. This letter read in part: “We have heard, that certain [men] which went out from us have troubled you with words, subverting your souls, saying, Ye must be circumcised, and keep the law, . . . [but] we gave no such commandments” (Acts 15:24).

In addition, in order to help reassure these Christians that the letter contained a genuine pronouncement and it was not a fraud, the leaders sent “chief men among the brethren” (Acts 15:22), named Judas Barabbas and Silas, to accompany Paul and Barnabas and act as witnesses of the decision of the council.

Reactions and Results

Apparently, not all Jewish Christians readily accepted the ruling of the Jerusalem Council. At some point after it took place, Peter and Paul were eating with some Gentile converts in Antioch when a group of Jewish Christians arrived from Jerusalem. Peter, the head of the Church, “withdrew and separated himself” (Galatians 2:12) because, in the opinion of Paul, he feared the disapproval of the Jewish Christians, who viewed eating with Gentiles as violating the law of Moses (see Galatians 2:12).

Paul was upset because Peter’s actions were having a negative effect upon those who were present, including Paul’s close friend and companion Barnabas (see Galatians 2:13). Paul felt that the example of Peter would completely undermine the decisions that had been made at the Jerusalem Conference and influence Gentiles to think they needed to “live as do the Jews” (Galatians 2:14), probably meaning to submit to the regulations of the Mosaic law. Paul likened these Jewish Christians unto “false brethren” whom he felt, in essence, were attempting to once again bring non-Jews into spiritual bondage by requiring them to keep the Jewish law (Galatians 2:4). In response to this issue, Paul boldly testified concerning the true relationship between salvation and keeping the law of Moses: “A man is not justified by the works of the law [of Moses], but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law [of Moses]: for by the works of the law [of Moses] shall no flesh be justified” (Galatians 2:16).

One may wonder why Peter, who had recently received an important revelation concerning Gentiles, who had authorized the baptism of the Gentile Cornelius, and who had testified at the Jerusalem Conference, would respond this way. In defence of the chief Apostle, however, one should recall that Peter was the leader of a relatively small church that was composed of two emotionally fragile factions; the situation was delicate. The Jewish Christians, on the one hand, did not appreciate the reluctance of some Gentiles to submit to the regulations of the Mosaic law, especially circumcision. Paul and his followers, on the other hand, were not worried about offending the feelings of the Jewish Christians who still held fast to the traditions of the law of Moses. Peter the prophet, naturally, loved and was concerned about both Jewish and Gentile members of the Church.

It was a no-win situation for Peter. If he continued eating with the Gentiles, he would offend the visiting group of Jewish Christians. If he departed, he would offend Paul and the Gentile Christians in Antioch. No compromise was possible. Either way, he was going to hurt some feelings. Maybe Peter felt that

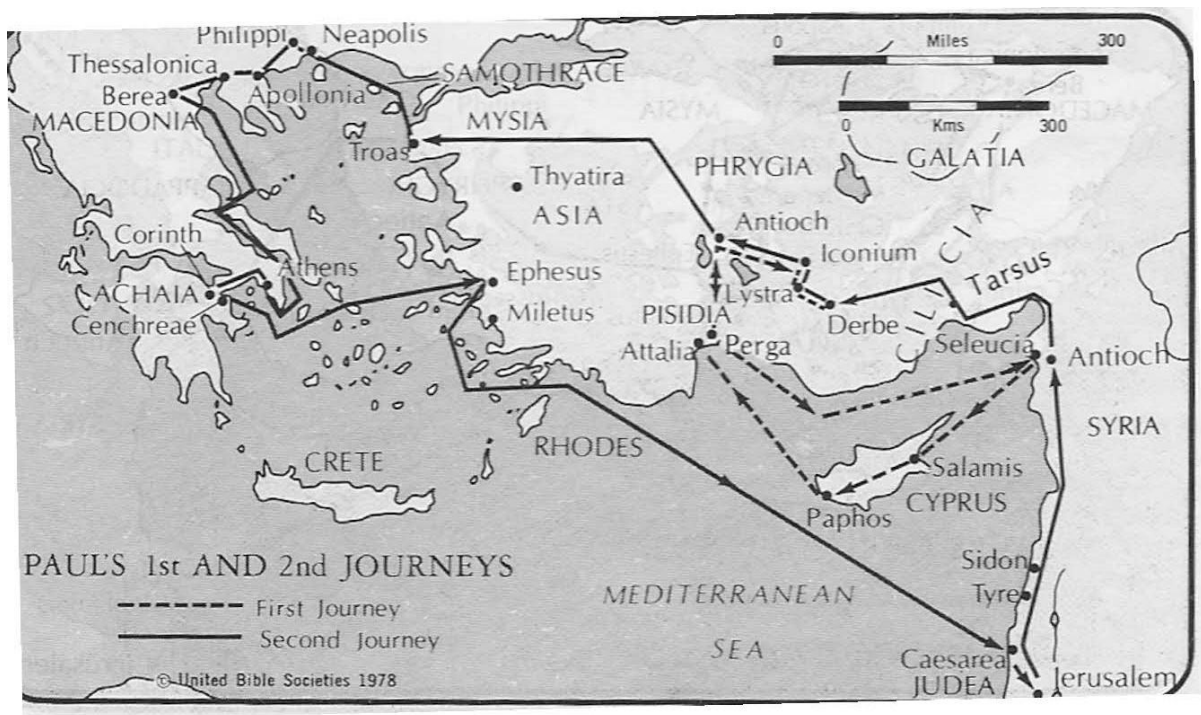
an offended Paul would still remain true, while an offended group of Jewish Christians would potentially influence many others to dissent or leave the young church. In any case, Peter chose to leave. The ambiguity of Jewish Christian attitudes toward the law of Moses would unfortunately continue for decades.

Conclusion

There are lessons that one can learn from this interesting episode in earliest Christian history. It has been pointed out, there can be “a conflict between culture and doctrine.” Because the law of Moses had been the central feature of Jewish life for over one thousand years it was extremely difficult to give up even after it was fulfilled in Christ. Applying the lessons learned from the Jerusalem Council, it has been observed, “Sometimes cultural customs obfuscate eternal principles.” Indeed, true disciples of Jesus Christ must be willing and able to give up long-held traditions when they conflict with living the principles of the gospel.



Macedonian landscape



Chapter 16

16:1-5. Paul finds Timothy

Verses 6-11. The call to Europe

16: 12-40. Second tour - Philippi

Verses 12-15. First European convert

Verses 16-24. Clash with demonism at Philippi

Verses 25-40. Persecution at Philippi

Verses 1-40

1. *In Derbe and Lystra again. Timotheus (Acts 16:1-5).*
2. *The Preaching forbidden in Asia (Acts 16:6-8).*
3. *The Vision of the Man from Macedonia (Acts 16:9-12).*
4. *The Gospel in Europe (Acts 16:13-40).*

Read in connection with the first verses of this chapter 1 Timothy 1:18; 1 Timothy 4:14; 2 Timothy 1:5-6; 2 Timothy 3:15. The circumcision of Timothy, the offspring of a mixed marriage, was not demanded by the law. Paul in

circumcising Timothy manifested his liberty; he acted graciously, not wishing to put a stumbling block in the way of the Jews (see 1 Corinthians 9:20).

They travel on through Phrygia and Galatia but were forbidden to preach in Asia. This was at that time a large province in Asia Minor with many flourishing cities. It was not God's purpose to have work done at that time. They followed divine guidance obediently. Later Paul spent three years in Ephesus, the capital of that province, and all Asia heard the Word. They also wanted to visit Bithynia, but were not allowed to do so. Bithynia heard the Word at another time perhaps through Peter (1 Peter 1:1-2). All this shows clearly how the Holy Spirit is an infallible guide in Christian service. He must point out the way and the places as well as the time when and where the Word is to be spoken. Then follows the vision of the Man from Macedonia. This Macedonian cry is answered at once. From the tenth verse we learn that Luke, the author of this record, joined the party. This is seen by the changed pronoun from "they" to "we." Then they reached Philippi. On the small river Gangites the first opportunity to minister is given. We wonder if Paul looked for the man he had seen in his vision. There was no man present. A company of women had gathered in the place "where prayer was wont to be made." Lydia of Thyatira is the first convert of Europe. She was a true worshipper of God like Cornelius. And it was the Lord who opened her heart. Satan's opposition is seen once more in the demon-possessed damsel. Satan is a cunning being full of wisdom. He tried through this damsel to establish a friendly relation with the servants of the Lord. But the Gospel does not need such support. After her conversion Satan changed his tactics. They were beaten with many stripes and cast into prison, their feet held in the stocks. What followed is familiar to all. God had worked in mighty power delivering His servants and saving the jailer and his household.



Philippi and Archaeology

The area of Philippi hosts a series of archaeological monuments, witnesses to a long historical path during which civilisations intersected and developed. The first archaeological evidence of organised life in the area dates from prehistoric times (5500 BC) and is found in the tell of Philippi, Dikili Tash. This is the oldest Neolithic settlement in the whole of East Macedonia and Thrace, and one of the largest tells in the Balkans. Life in the ancient city of Philippi began when the Thasians founded the colony of Krenides in the interior in 360 BC. The colony was soon (356 BC) conquered by Philip II of Macedon (359-336 BC), fortified and renamed Philippi. The Battle of Philippi took place in 42 BC, between the armies of the Republicans Cassius and Brutus, and the supporters of Julius Caesar, Octavian and Mark Antony. The Emperor accorded Philippi the honour of implementing Roman Law and the name Colonia Augusta Julia Philippensis in 27 BC.

The Via Egnatia, one of the longest military and trading roads in the ancient world, also passed through Philippi, bringing the city to the forefront of major historical events.

Philippi played a decisive role in the expansion of Christianity when, in 49/50 AD, Paul the Apostle visited the city, founded the first Christian church in Europe and baptised the first European Christians, an event that affected the whole continent. The Epistle to the Philippians, the first Christian community in Europe, sealed the long and close relationship between the Apostle and the

Philippi congregation. There was an episcopal see of Philippi from as early as the mid-4th century AD. The exceptional examples of early Christian architecture (the three Early Christian basilicas, the Octagon church, baths that remained in use into the Christian period, the “Bishop’s Palace”, private houses), dating from the mid-4th century AD onwards, bear eloquent witness to the power and vitality of the Church of Philippi and its influence on the contemporary Christian world. These were closely linked to developments in the metropolitan see of Constantinople, if not directly financed by it.

The immediate historical landscape of Philippi also includes:

A) The rock art in the Lekani foothills, approximately two kilometres east of the city of Krenides, depicting human and animal figures and the distinctive “horseman”.

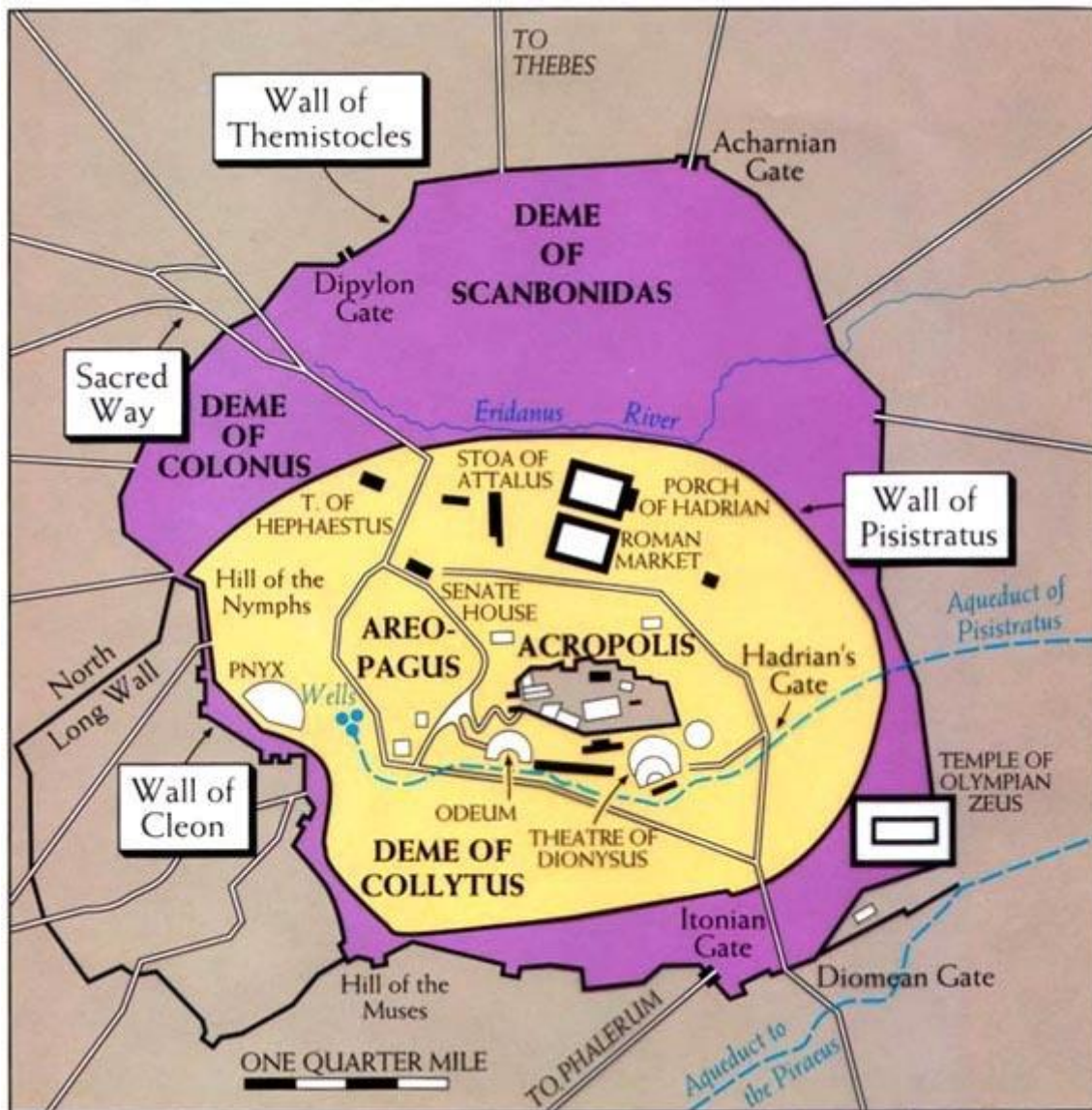
B) The important mines in the area east of Philippi and northeast of the ancient port of Neapoli (modern-day Kavala), identified with those referred to by Herodotus and Thucydides as Skapte Hyle.



The huge amphitheatre at Philippi



The Acropolis, Athens, topped by the Pantheon



Archaeology and Athens

The view of modern Athens, if someone looks at it standing somewhere in one of the mountains that encircled the Athenian basin, is astonishing causing to observer a great amazement and different feelings. The city fills the whole area of the basin and expands even to the nearest mountains and hills proceeding out of natural borders. The huge semi white mass of box shape buildings is interrupted by disorderly spaces of plants. The curved lines of the vaults of churches are various without though changing the uniformity of the architectural lines. From this mass of buildings emerge the marvellous sacred hill of Acropolis and the group of the neighbouring hills and in dynamic contradiction the Lycabettus hill and the line of Brelessus hills namely Tourkovounia. It is also quite amazing the cathedral of Athens, which also has a specific architectural character. The metropolis of Athens was developed quite suddenly under the pressure of circumstances.

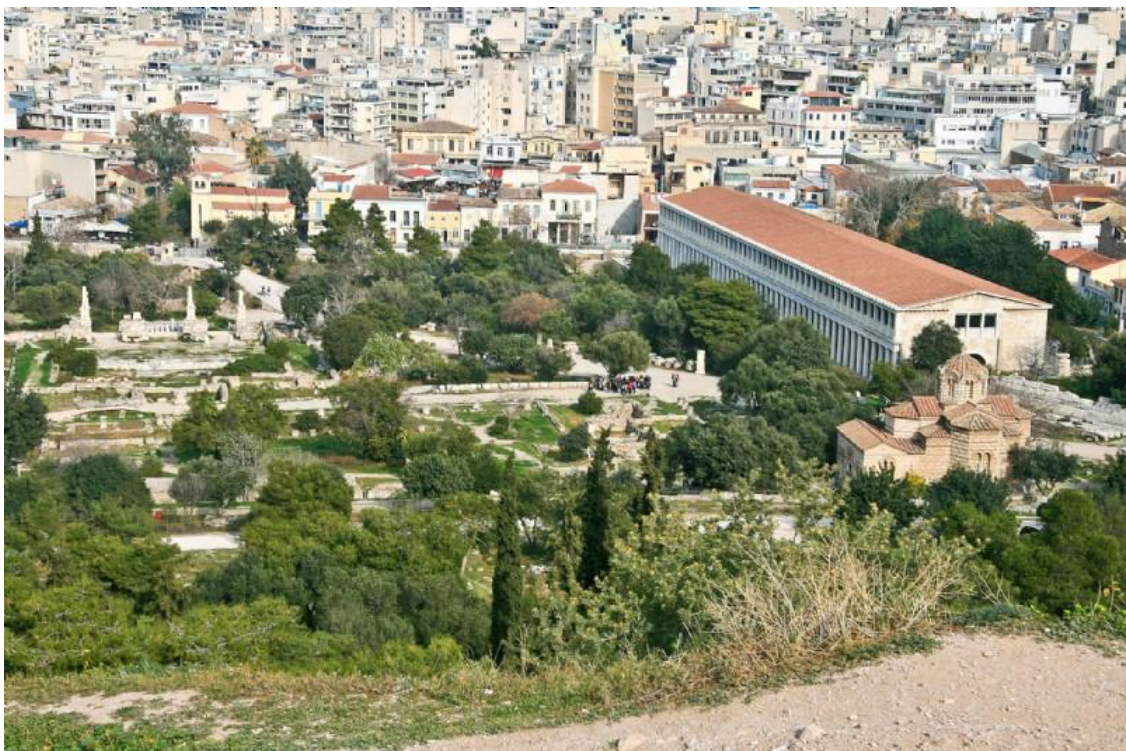
As a matter of fact, this city that seems suffering from gigantism lay inside the web of the ancient municipals. This view is different nowadays because the city seems more massive instead of a group of smaller urban cells. The modern city lives with a rat race rhythm and its urban structure offers restricted possibilities of walking and transportation. The walking in the city is restricted in specific urban zones despite the fact that offer a way out between the present and the historical past. Of course the inhabitants of Athens under the pressure of daily life, are not able to see the glorious past of the city. However the Athenian past is obvious in every corner of the basin. Apart the illustrious monuments of antiquity, the elegant Byzantine churches and the neoclassic edifices, combined all together with the natural environment, consist the lively link between the past the present. The presence of the past is continuous in modern Athens and the evidences of historical continuity are quite rich.

The urban web of the city is still based on the ancient one. The roads and the axons of main streets are the same or following the axons of the ancient ones. Though the most impressive is the continuity in use of the urban area. And this is what is called historic sequel and continuation of Athenian landscape, which the inhabitant or the tourist has to know and live.

The National Foundation of Research having as main goal to provide the historic continuity of Athens had organised in 1994 a series of twelve tutorials with main issue the Archaeology of Athens. The twelve scholars presented the most crucial and important issues of the history of Athenian urban and suburban space from pre historic times to modern ones. The audience responding and attendance of those tutorials was amazing and hence the reports were published in a corpus under the wing of municipality of Athens. But this book was out of print very soon and therefore instead of republishing the Foundation decided to make a digital edition of the conference along with important additions to the texts and references from historical sources and pictures. The most important texts are translated in English too. The conference of Archaeology of Athens and the edition were take place under the wing of the programme “Society of Information”.



The Stoa of Attalus has been reconstructed to its former state.. It provided a cool place of meeting



View from the Acropolis looking north and down into the area of the west agora. The prominent, red-roofed, building on the right (west) side of the

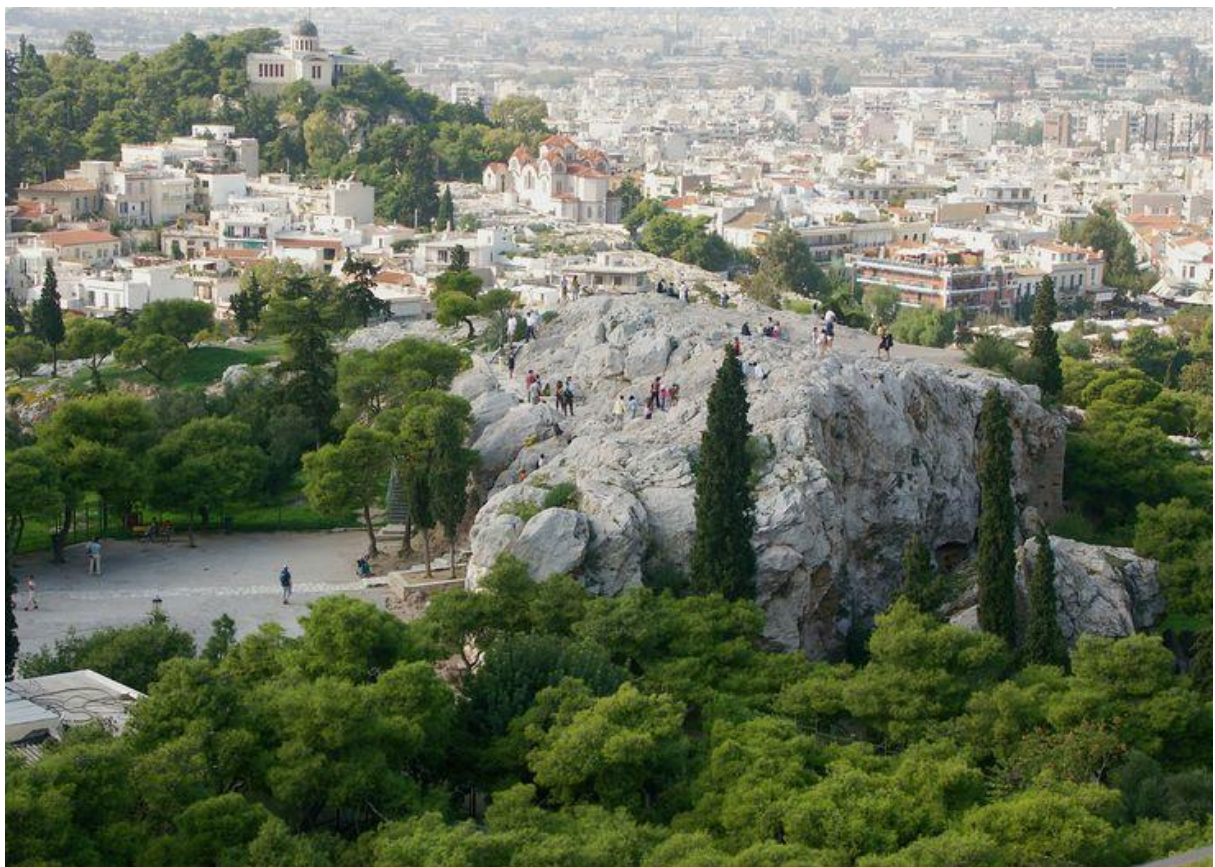
image is the reconstructed stoa of Attalus.

Attalus II (a ruler from Pergamum [in Asia!] 159–138 B.C.) built this stoa and it actually divides the “agora” area north of the acropolis into two sections.

To the left (west) of the Stoa of Attalus is the old Greek agora (visible in image – in centre and left [west] of centre). To the right (east) of the Stoa are the remains (not visible in this image) of the — more recent, but still ancient — Roman forum. In Paul’s day the Roman forum was the commercial centre, while the older Greek agora was given over to monuments and temples.

The reconstructed Stoa of Attalus was dedicated in 1956 and the lower floor houses a wonderful museum, while the upper floor serves as the headquarters for the American School of Archaeology in Athens — the organization that has been excavating the agora since the 1930’s.

The Greek Orthodox Church just below (south of) the Stoa of Attalus (on the right side of the image) is the Church of the Holy Apostles that was built circa A.D. 1020. It has been restored to its original form.



The Areopagus, or Mars Hill, below the Acropolis, Athens

Then Paul stood in the midst of Mars' hill, and said, Ye men of Athens, I perceive that in all things ye are too superstitious. For as I passed by, and beheld your devotions, I found an altar with this inscription, TO THE UNKNOWN GOD. Whom therefore ye ignorantly worship, him declare I unto you. God that made the world and all things therein, seeing that he is Lord of heaven and earth, dwelleth not in temples made with hands; Neither is worshipped with men's hands, as though he needed any thing, seeing he giveth to all life, and breath, and all things. Acts 17:22-25

Chapter 17

17:1-14. Second tour – Thessalonica, Berea

Verses 1-9. Paul at Thessalonica

Verses 10-14. Paul at Berea

17: 15-34. Second tour – Athens

Verses 15-18. Paul and Athenian idolatry

Verses 19-34. Paul's sermon to Areopagus

Verses 1-34

1. The Gospel in Thessalonica (Acts 17:1-9).

2. The Gospel in Berea (Acts 17:10-14).

3. Paul in Athens (Acts 17:15-34).

Three cities in which the Gospel is next preached are before us in this chapter. But there is a marked difference between these three places. In Thessalonica there was much hostility, the result of the success of the Gospel. In Berea a more noble class of Jews were found. Their nobility consisted in submission to the Scriptures, the oracles of God, and in a ready mind. There was a still greater blessing among the Jews and the Gentiles. In Athens the Apostle Paul met idolatry, indifference and ridicule.

An interesting fact is learned concerning the activity of the apostle in Thessalonica from the two Epistles, which he addressed some time after to the Thessalonians. These were the first Epistles Paul wrote. From these we learn

that the Apostle not only preached the Gospel, but also taught the Thessalonian believers prophetic Truths and emphasized the Second Coming of Christ and the events connected with it. In the Second Epistle he reminds them of his oral teaching (2 Thessalonians 2:5).

The address Paul gave in Athens has three sections: 1. The Introduction (Acts 17:22-23) in which he refers to the altar with the strange inscription “to the unknown God.” Then he uttered the words, “Him I declare unto you.” 2. Who the unknown God is (Acts 17:24-29). He is a personal God who made the world and all that is in it. He answered the Epicurean and Stoic schools of philosophy. Materialism and Pantheism were thus swept aside. 3. He closes with the message from God (Acts 17:30-31).

He aims at their conscience to awaken them to the sense of need to turn away from idols to the true God. God sends to all One message, be they Jew or Gentiles, Greeks or Barbarians, to repent. And then he states the reason. A day is appointed in which He will judge the world in righteousness. The one through whom God will judge is a Man ordained by Him; then follows the declaration of the resurrection of this Man. The day of judgment here does not mean a universal judgment (a term not known in Scripture) nor the great white throne judgment. The judgment here does not concern the dead at all, but it is the judgment of the habitable world. It is the judgment which will take place when the Man whom God raised from the dead, our Lord Jesus Christ, comes the second time. His resurrection is the assurance of it.

Chapter 18

18:1-22. Second tour – Corinth

Verses 1-11. Founding the church

Verses 12-17. Paul before Gallio

Verses 18-22. End of second tour

18:23—19:7. Third tour begun – John’s disciples

18:23. Beginning of third tour

18:24-28. Apollos at Ephesus

Verses 1-28

1. In Corinth with Aquila and Priscilla. His Testimony and Separation from the Jews (Acts 18:1-8).

2. *Encouragement from the Lord in a vision* (Acts 18:9-11).
3. *Paul and Gallio* (Acts 18:12-17).
4. *From Corinth to Ephesus and Antioch. The second journey ended* (Acts 18:18-22).
5. *Establishing disciples in Galatia and Phrygia* (Acts 18:23).
6. *Apollos, the Alexandrian* (Acts 18:24-28).

Aquila and Priscilla are mentioned here for the first time. This interesting couple had established themselves in Corinth, and what a joy it must have been to the Apostle when he was led to their home. How sweet their fellowship must have been as they toiled together in their trade as tent makers and spoke one to another about the Lord. From the same chapter we learn that after Paul's ministry had terminated they went to Ephesus (Acts 18:19). From 1 Corinthians 16:19 we learn that they were still there when that epistle was written. But in writing to the Romans Paul says, "Greet Priscilla and Aquila, my helpers in Christ Jesus" (Romans 16:3), so that they had wandered back to Rome and were in happy fellowship with the Roman assembly. 2 Timothy 4:19 tells us that once more they were back in Ephesus where Timothy had his abode. "Salute Prisca (an abbreviation of Priscilla) and Aquila." They were indeed strangers and pilgrims, but blessed to know that their wanderings were by the Lord. Priscilla is mostly mentioned before Aquila, from which we may learn that she, like other notable women of apostolic days, "laboured for the Gospel."

It seems that Paul followed the same method of work as he did in Thessalonica. First, he reasoned in the synagogue every Sabbath and persuaded the Jews and the Greeks (Acts 18:4). This must have been altogether on Old Testament ground, showing the divine predictions concerning Christ. When Silas and Timotheus arrived, then he was greatly pressed in spirit and testified to the Jews more fully that Jesus is the Christ. That there was blessed fruit we learn from his epistles to the Corinthians. He himself baptized Crispus and Gaius and the household of Stephanas (1 Corinthians 1:14-16). And he was with them in weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling. His speech was far different from the one he had used in addressing the philosophers of Athens. "My speech was not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power" (1 Corinthians 2:3-4). His presence was base unto them "Who in presence am base among you" (2 Corinthians 10:1). His bodily presence, these Corinthians said, is weak, and his speech contemptible (2 Corinthians 10:10).

The Lord encouraged His servant in a vision. The Jews' attempt to harm Paul through Gallio failed. Sosthenes the chief ruler received a beating instead of the apostle.

If the Sosthenes who is mentioned in the opening verse of the first Epistle of the Corinthians is the same, then he profited immensely by his experience. Paul addresses him as a brother. We believe he is the same person, for the Grace of God delights to take up such characters and show in them what Grace can do.

From Corinth he went to Ephesus, then to Jerusalem and back to Antioch. Thus ended the second missionary journey. After this he established the disciples in Galatia and Phrygia. An extremely beautiful incident closes this chapter. A new preacher appeared among the Jews in Ephesus, Apollos the Alexandrian. He is described as an eloquent man and mighty in the Scriptures. In Alexandria, Philo, the great Hellenistic Jewish Philosopher, had flourished. He was born about 20 B.C. and died after the year 40 A.D. He introduced Platonism into Judaism. In all probability Apollos was one of his disciples, but he accepted that which Philo did not believe. He had come most likely in touch with disciples of John the Baptist, and had been baptized with John's baptism unto repentance. He knew that Jesus is the Messiah, knew the facts of His earthly life and the miracles He did. Of the meaning of His death and resurrection Apollos knew nothing, nor had he any knowledge of the Holy Spirit. The entire truth of the Gospel of Grace was unknown to Him. The text in the authorized version that he "taught diligently the things of the Lord" is incorrect. The correct translation is "he taught diligently the things concerning Jesus."

Aquila and Priscilla were then used to expound unto him the way of God more perfectly.

Chapter 19

19:1-7. Apollos' disciples become Christians

19: 8-41. Third tour Ephesus

Verses 8-22. Paul's powerful Ephesian ministry

Verses 23-41. Clash with the cult of Diana

Verses 1-41

1. The second visit of Paul to Ephesus. The twelve disciples of John (Acts 19:1-7).

2. *The Apostle's continued labours. The separation of the disciples. The Province Asia evangelized* (Acts 19:8-10).

3. *The Power of God and the Power of Satan* (Acts 19:11-20).

4. *Paul plans to go to Jerusalem and to visit Rome* (Acts 19:21-22).

5. *The opposition and riot at Ephesus* (Acts 19:23-41).

The disciples whom Paul found at Ephesus were disciples of John. The question the Apostle asked them has often been made the foundation of wrong teaching concerning the Holy Spirit. It is claimed that the Holy Spirit must be received in a special manner after conversion. The little word "since" in Paul's question must be changed into "when," for it is mistranslated. "Did ye receive the Holy Spirit when ye believed?"

Paul makes the gift of the Spirit a test of true discipleship. If they were true believers they received the Holy Spirit when they believed, that is when they accepted the Lord Jesus Christ as their Saviour. If they did not receive the Holy Spirit then it is an evidence that they did not believe. "Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of His" (Romans 8:9).

They heard next the full truth of the Gospel and believed, therefore they received the gift of the Spirit. Ephesus was the stronghold of Satan. When the power of God was manifested in the special miracles of Paul and the demons were driven out, then Satan also began to work. A great victory over the power of darkness followed.

Then Paul purposed in the spirit (Acts 19:21) to go to Jerusalem. This verse marks an important change, which introduces us to the last stage of the recorded acts of Paul in this historical account. Rome is the goal which looms up before him. "I must also see Rome." And he saw Rome, but not in the way as he purposed in his spirit, but as the prisoner of the Lord. His journey begins now towards that great city, and at the close of the book we find him there a prisoner. The story of his journey to Jerusalem, a journey in which he perseveres though repeatedly warned by the Spirit of God, his arrest in Jerusalem, his trials and addresses before the Jews, before Felix, Festus and King Agrippa, his voyage to Rome and shipwreck and arrival in Rome, are the contents of the remaining part of our book.

The question has often been raised how the purposing of Paul in the spirit to go again to Jerusalem is to be understood. Is the word "spirit" to be written with a capital "S" or not? In other words, did he purpose in the Spirit of God, after prolonged prayer, to go up to Jerusalem? Did the Holy Spirit guide him to take

up to the city of his fathers the contributions from Achaia and Macedonia for the poor saints? (Romans 15:25-26). It could not have been the Spirit of God who prompted him to go once more to Jerusalem, for we find that during the journey the Holy Spirit warned him a number of times not to go to Jerusalem.

He was called to evangelize; to continue to preach the glorious Gospel, and it was a turning aside from the great ministry committed unto him. But behind his burning desire to go up to Jerusalem stood the mighty constraint of love for his own beloved brethren. How he did love them and how his heart, filled with the love of God, yearned over them! This love is so fully expressed in his epistle to the Romans. “I say the truth in Christ, I lie not, my conscience also bearing me witness in the Holy Spirit, that I have great heaviness and continual sorrow in my heart. For I could wish that myself were accursed (or separated) from Christ for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh” (Romans 9:1-2). “Brethren, my heart’s desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved” (Romans 10:1). This holy love and courage prompted him to say, when once more his brethren had besought him by the Spirit not to go up to Jerusalem, “What mean ye to weep and break my heart? for I am ready not to be bound only, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus” (Acts 21:13).

In the close of this chapter we read of the great opposition and riot in Ephesus and the Apostle’s persecution.



The great theatre at Ephesus – Acts 19



Archaeological light: The Ancient City of Ephesus

The world serves as the home to thousands of remarkable and amazing places that boast of a history that goes a long, long way back in time. Many of these have managed to stand the test of time and still remain upright, serving as the memoirs of some of the most important happenings and incidences in history. One of these places that continue to be the subject of awe and admiration is none other than Ephesus.

Middle East's Own Version of Rome

If the world's ancient cities always get the attention of being the perfect destination for family vacations, enthusiasts of ancient history will surely be glad to know that there still remains to be one city in the Middle East which has not been completely transformed by remodeling and reconstruction. Up to this day, there are still enough Ephesus ruins found in Turkey, giving its visitors the chance of imagining how it could have been like to live back in the ancient times. While it might not be as famous as Rome, there are still plenty of tourists that take great interest in discovering the remains of the ancient city of Ephesus and many of them take their time in exploring the wonders of one of the olden

times' centre of trade and commerce.

Ephesus Ruins and Its Glorious Temples

If there is one spot that plays a big part in the story of the ancient city of Ephesus, it will be none other than the Temple of Artemis. Even though the visitors of this modern age can no longer see anything beyond the ruins, several of its broken columns make the temple a perfect place for contemplating wrecks of time. During its heyday, it was generally regarded that the temple was actually a wonderful place for worshipping one of the ancient era's most famous goddesses. Just like all of the old buildings, the Temple of Artemis was built, rebuilt and altered throughout the centuries. According to the legend, the temple was burned during the 4th century, which was the same day that Alexander the Great was born to the world. This very story was what helped in raising the immortality rank of the Temple of Artemis. It was around 100s BC when its latest construction was made, with its downfall being the Gothic invasion.

Some of the other temples found in the Ephesus ruins include the Temple of Hadrian and the Temple of Domitian, with the former boasting of an exquisite front entrance that once again shows how lovely the temple could have been during its prime. The Temple of Hadrian is found in ancient Ephesus's famous region called Curetes Street. During your visit to this temple, take time looking at the intricate decorations etched to its façade and study the details that were added very carefully to every single spot. And while strolling the street, reconstructing it in one's mind eye will help any visitor to imagine how glorious it was during its days.

Impressive Ruins of the Theatre of Ephesus

For those interested in the history of ancient Rome's spectator sports and the strong gladiators, the Theatre of Ephesus deserves to be included in the list of destinations during the exploration of the Ephesus ruins. With just a single glance at this colossal stadium, any onlooker will see that the place then held great importance and popularity, being able to seat thousands of fans cheering for their bets. The theatre's run also reveal exceptional craftsmanship, with the columns showing that only minimal ornamentation has been used.

Situated on Panayir Hill, the visitors will never miss the Ephesus Theatre. Originally established in the BC era, the Romans rebuilt the theatre after they took over the entire territory and the theatre form made by the Roman is what exists up to this day. Based on the historical records of Ephesus, it can be deduced that there are plenty of other functions that happened in this amazing edifice, not just the violent games commonly associated with Rome. During the time of the ancient Ephesus, the citizen can come to the theatre to attend gathering of faith, to watch a play, and discuss the newest theology, just to name a few.

The Grotto of the Seven Sleepers and The Meryemana

Back in the earlier days, the city of Ephesus lacked a good reputation among the moral scholars. However, these notions are not totally replaced by awe and admiration and despite how its previous inhabitants might have been acted in the past, the Ephesus ruins still deserved to be admired for what remains. The ancient city of Ephesus is one extraordinary architectural gem of the world that is only waiting to be discovered and explored. Religious history enthusiasts must never miss the chance of visiting one of the must see attractions of the place, none other the Meryemana, believed to be place that served as the home to Virgin Mary herself.

Even though there is no definite proof that it was the actual home of Virgin Mary, there is no denying that Meryemana deserves to be among the fascinating prospects that should be considered by Christian pilgrims. The house itself is unassuming and plain, and it can be deduced that it is truly an ancient building. Once you get inside the house, the visitors will be welcomed by a stunning shrine that abounds with all kinds of treasures that will surely please the eyes. Also, pilgrims take a great interest in pilgrims due to the trip that was once made by Apostle Paul to the city as well as by a certain place called Grotto of the Seven Sleepers, an interesting legend involving the miraculous time travel experienced by the Christian youths back in the olden days.

The wonderful city of Ephesus holds a lot of memories of the past, places that remain to be the home of some of the world history's important incidences and without a doubt, this ancient city will continue to be a reminder for the present generation of how wonderful and mystical the olden times were.

Chapter 20

20. Third tour – Macedonia to Miletus

Verses 1-6. Last visit to Greece

Verses 7-16. From Troas to Miletus

Verses 17-38. Farewell to the Ephesus elders at Miletus

Verses 1-38

1. Paul in Macedonia (Acts 20:1-2).

2. His abode in Greece, the visit to Troas and what transpired there (Acts 20:3-12).

3. The journey from Troas to Miletus (Acts 20:13-16).

4. The farewell to the Ephesian Elders (Acts 20:17-38).

The record before us is very brief. Some have thought the reason is the fact that the Apostle had turned aside from His given ministry, and therefore the Holy Spirit had nothing to report. We believe that this is correct. The object of the Spirit of God is now to lead us rapidly forward to the last visit of the Apostle to Jerusalem, therefore much is passed over in the untiring service and labors of the great Man of God. After the uproar was over in Ephesus Paul embraced the disciples and departed to go into Macedonia. It is the first farewell scene on this memorable journey. He must have visited Philippi, Thessalonica, Beroea and perhaps other cities. Besides giving them much exhortation, he received their fellowship for the poor saints in Jerusalem.

Then there is the record of the blessed scene on the first day of the week in Troas. They remembered the Lord in the breaking of bread (1 Corinthians 11:23-26).

The company then took ship to sail to Assos, but Paul made the journey of over twenty miles on foot. He wanted to be alone like Elijah as well as others. What thoughts must have passed through his mind! What burdens must have been upon his heart! what anxieties in connection with that coming visit to Jerusalem!

From Miletus Paul sent to Ephesus and called the elders of the church. The remaining part of this chapter contains his great farewell address to the Ephesian elders and through them to the church located there. Two great speeches by the Apostle have so far been reported in this book. The first was addressed to the Jews in Antioch of Pisidia (Acts 13:16-41). The second was addressed to the Gentiles in Athens (chapter 17). The address here in our chapter is to the church. It is of very great and unusual interest and importance. He speaks of himself, his own integrity and recalls to them his ministry. He declares his own coming sufferings and his determination not to count his life dear, but to finish his course with joy. He warns the church concerning the future apostasy and the appearance in their midst of false teachers.

Chapter 21

21. End of third tour – on to Jerusalem

Verses 1-14. From Miletus to Caesarea

Verses 15-40. Paul in Jerusalem

Verses 1-40

1. *The journey from Miletus to Tyre and Ptolemais* (Acts 21:1-7).
2. *In Caesarea* (Acts 21:8-14).
3. *The Apostle's Arrival in Jerusalem and his visit to the Temple* (Acts 21:15-26).
4. *The Uproar in the Temple. Paul taken prisoner* (Acts 21:27-40).

Coos, Rhodes and Patara are mentioned. Then they sailed over to Phenicia and landed in Tyre. Here they found disciples.

And the Holy Spirit through these disciples warned the Apostle at once that he should not go to Jerusalem. This, indeed, was very solemn. If these disciples had spoken of themselves, if it said that they were in anxiety over Paul's journey to that city, one might say that they were simply speaking as men; but the record makes it clear that the Holy Spirit spoke through them. Could then the Apostle Paul have been under the guidance of that same Spirit in going to Jerusalem? As stated before, the great love for his brethren, his kinsmen, burned in his heart, and so great was his desire to be in Jerusalem that he ignored the voice of the Spirit.

In Caesarea they were the guests of Philip the evangelist. Here Agabus, who had given a prediction of a great dearth years ago (11:28) comes once more upon the scene. When he had come he took Paul's girdle and with it bound his own hands and feet, and then he said: "Thus saith the Holy Spirit, So shall the Jews at Jerusalem bind the man that owneth this girdle, and shall deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles." Here then another warning was given. It was the last and by far the strongest. Did Agabus really speak by the Spirit? The literal fulfillment of his predictive action furnishes the answer. The whole company, both his fellow travelers and the believers in Caesarea, began to beseech him not to go up to Jerusalem.

Then they reached Jerusalem. On the next day the company paid a visit to James, in whose house all the elders had assembled for the purpose of meeting with Paul and his friends. And now once more the Apostle relates what no doubt was dearest to the hearts of James and the elders, what God had wrought through His God-given ministry among the Gentiles. It must have been a very lengthy account; for he rehearsed particularly, "or one by one," the things which had happened in His great activity. After Paul had spoken, "they glorified God."

All had progressed nicely up to this point. But now the great crisis is rapidly reached. The meeting had been called in the house of James, and only the elders had been invited for a very good reason. Reports had reached Jerusalem that Paul had taught the Jews among the Gentiles to forsake Moses, and even to deny children the covenant sign, circumcision. Most likely the Judaizing element in the assembly of Jerusalem, the men who were so successfully overcome by the bold arguments of the Apostle at the council in Jerusalem (Acts 15:1-41. Galatians 2:1-21), the men who so strenuously taught, that unless the Gentiles became circumcised, they could not be saved--these men were responsible for the rumors. What could be done to convince the multitude that all this was incorrect, that Paul after all was a good Jew?

The elders suggest to him that there were four men who had a vow on them. These he should take and purify himself with them as well as pay the charges. This action, they reasoned, would not only demonstrate that the reports were untrue, but that he, the Apostle of Gentiles, "walketh orderly and keepeth the law." To make this temptation stronger, they restated that which had been agreed concerning the status of the believing Gentiles, according to the decision of the church council years ago. All was a most subtle snare. He was by that action to show that, with all his preaching to the Gentiles, he was still a good Jew, faithful to all the traditions of the fathers, and attached to the temple.

And a strange sight it is to see the Apostle Paul back in the temple, going through these dead ceremonies, which had been ended by the death of the cross. A strange sight to see him, who disclaimed all earthly authority and taught deliverance from the Law and a union with an unseen Christ, submitting once more to the elementary things, as he calls them in his Epistle to the Galatians,"the beggarly elements!" And has not the whole professing church fallen into the same snare?

His arrest followed and he is taken prisoner. A great tumult followed. They would have killed him if the chief captain had not rescued him. He then was bound with two chains. Agabus' prophecy is fulfilled.

Paul gives the Roman officer his pedigree. "I am a man, a Jew of Tarsus," and then requests the privilege of addressing the furious mob. This was permitted, and taking a prominent place on the stairs, where he could be seen by all below, and when after beckoning to the people, silence had been secured, he addressed them in Hebrew. The break of the chapter at this point is unfortunate. The next chapter contains the first address of defence of the prisoner Paul.

Chapter 22

22. Paul's defence before the populace

Verses 1-21. Paul gives his testimony

Verses 22-30. Paul appeals to his Roman citizenship

Verses 1-30

1. The Address of the Apostle (Acts 22:1-21).

2. The Answer from the Mob, and Paul's Appeal to His Roman citizenship (Acts 22:22-30).

What a scene it was! On the stairs, midway between the temple-court and the fortress, stood the Apostle in chains, his person showing the effects of the beating he had received. Around him were the well-armed Roman soldiers, and below the multitude, with up-turned faces, still wildly gesticulating and only becoming more silent when they heard the first words from Paul's lips in the Hebrew tongue.

He relates his great experience. They were impatient listeners; the storm broke with the word "Gentiles." Another great tumult resulted and the many voices demanded that such a fellow should not live. It was a scene of utmost confusion.

The chief captain seems to have been ignorant of the Aramaic dialect. He gave orders that Paul be now removed into the castle itself, and be examined by scourging so that he might find out why they cried so against him. He was led away, and everything made ready for the cruel treatment, when the prisoner spoke: "Is it lawful for you to scourge a man that is a Roman, and uncondemned?" The centurion reported this to the chiliarch, the chief officer, who at once appeared on the scene. When he discovered that Paul was indeed a Roman by birth, they left their hands off of his person, and even the chiliarch was afraid. It was a highly illegal act to bind a Roman.

Not a few had pointed to this as a prominent failure in the career of the Apostle. According to these critics he made a grave mistake when he pleaded his Roman citizenship; he should have been silent and taken the unjust and cruel treatment without a murmur. If some of these harsh critics of the beloved Apostle were placed in the same condition, what would they do? As one has truly said: "It is easy to be a martyr in theory, and such are seldom martyrs in practice." He had a perfect right to tell the ignorant officers of the law who he was, and thus prevent a flagrant and cruel transgression of the law. And yet his conduct in Philippi was

far different. Why did he not announce his Roman citizenship there? The power of the Spirit rested then upon him; it is different here.

Chapter 23

23. Paul's defence before the Sanhedrin

Verses 1-10. Before the Sanhedrin

Verses 11-22. Plot to kill Paul

Verses 23-35. Paul sent to Caesarea

- 1. Paul before the Sanhedrin (Acts 23:1-10).*
- 2. The vision of the Lord (Acts 23:11).*
- 3. The Conspiracy against Paul (Acts 23:12-22).*
- 4. Paul taken to Caesarea (Acts 23:23-35).*

And now we find him addressing the Sanhedrin. For the last time the Jewish council is mentioned in this book. Three times before the Sanhedrin had been called together in connection with those who believed in the Lord Jesus (Acts 4:5; Acts 5:21; Acts 6:12-15). Looking straight at the council, Paul did not wait for the formalities connected with the proceedings, but addressed the gathered Sanhedrin as men and brethren. And strange are the words with which he opened his defence: "I have lived in all good conscience before God until this day." In this he made a public declaration of his righteousness, which reminds us of his confession as a Pharisee (Philippians 3:4-6). This self-justification shows that he was not acting under the leading of the Holy Spirit. This bold language resulted in stirring up the anger of the high priest Ananias, who commanded that the bystanders should smite the Apostle on the mouth. And Paul was not slow to reply with a harsh word, calling the high priest "a whited wall" and demanding of God to smite him. No doubt the high priest was indeed a "whited wall" and fully deserved the judgment from God. But did Paul in speaking thus show the meekness of Him, whose servant he was?

In a clever way he tries to bring in dissension by his statement of being a Pharisee and the son of a Pharisee. A big commotion followed. Some of the scribes belonging to the Pharisees cried loudly in defence of the prisoner--"We find no evil in this man; but if a spirit or an angel has spoken to him, let us not fight against God." The latter sentence was a faint echo of the advice given by Gamaliel. The scene which followed beggars description. The shouting must have been terrific and Paul was in danger of being pulled to pieces by the

council mob. Lysias, the chief captain, was obliged to interfere. The soldiers, at his command, came down and rescued Paul and brought him into the castle. The cleverness of Paul had been the means of liberating him from the hands of the Sanhedrin.

The night following the Lord appeared unto him and comforted him. No doubt he had sought before His face in confession and self-judgment. He is in the Lord's hands. Forty men had made a conspiracy not to eat and to drink till they had killed him.

The prisoner of the Lord is now delivered into the hands of the Gentiles. A large force of soldiers accompanied Paul for his protection. The danger was great, hence the great precaution the chief officer, whose name is now mentioned, Claudius Lysias, had taken. Could we have read in Paul's own heart we would have seen there the peace of Christ; the words of His Lord still resounded in that faithful and devoted heart--"Be of good cheer."

The letter of Claudius Lysias to the governor Felix is interesting. It shows how Lysias claims the full credit of having rescued Paul, because he was a Roman. He declares him innocent, yet delivers him into the hands of the governor.

One would also like to know what had become of the forty conspirators. If they were true to their vow not to eat nor to drink till Paul had been killed, they must have starved to death, which, we are sure, did not happen. Caesarea is reached in safety and Paul is delivered into the hands of the governor, who promised him a hearing as soon as the accusers would arrive. Jerusalem now laid forever behind him. Rome was before him.

Chapter 24

24. Paul before Felix

Verses 1-23. Before Felix the first time

Verses 24-27. Before Felix the second time

- 1. The indictment of Paul (Acts 24:1-9).*
- 2. The defence of the Apostle (Acts 24:10-21).*
- 3. How Felix disposed of the case (Acts 24:22-23).*
- 4. Paul addresses Felix (Acts 24:24-27).*

If the Jews, after Paul's removal from Jerusalem, had not pressed the case against him, he would have been liberated. As he had gone years ago to Damascus to persecute the Christians there, so now the Jews follow him to Caesarea to accuse him before the Roman governor. They evidently did not lose any time. Only a few days had elapsed when a strong deputation from Jerusalem appeared in Caesarea. The high priest filled with much hatred against Paul had taken it upon himself to come in person. This must have been an unusual occurrence for a person of Ananias' standing to leave Jerusalem.

They brought along a certain orator named Tertullus, who accused Paul in the presence of Felix. The words Tertullus used against the great man of God are extremely vile and manifest the hiss of the serpent. He calls him a pestilent fellow," a person whom Society may well be rid of. The indictment contains three counts. First stands a Political accusation. This, in presence of the high Roman officer, was of the greatest importance. Any conspiracy against the Roman government was a capital offense. The charge of sedition or treason was thus at once laid at the door of the Apostle. The second offense Tertullus brought against Paul was of a religious nature. As ringleader of the Nazarenes, presented by him as a sect of the Jews, he had abetted that which was against the peace of Judaism and introduced not alone a disturbing element, but had transgressed another Roman law, which forbade the introduction of an unrecognized religion. The third charge was the profanation of the temple. Paul answers the indictment in a masterly way. His address contains a denial of the first charge; a confession and admission concerning the second, and a complete vindication of the accusation of the temple profanation.

Felix knew the accusations were not true, but he refused decision. Paul should have been set at liberty. Felix defers it till Lysias the chief-captain came to Caesarea. But he never came, and Paul was kept a prisoner. Felix and his wife, Drusilla, the daughter of Herod Agrippa I, a wicked woman, heard Paul and Felix trembled. Later Felix left Paul behind a prisoner, when Porcius Festus became governor.

Chapter 25

25-26. Paul before Festus and Agrippa

25:1-12. Before Festus

25:13-26:32. Paul before Agrippa

Verses 1-27

1. Festus and the Jews. Paul appeals to Caesar (Acts 25:1-12).

2. *King Agrippa visits Festus (Acts 25:13-27).*

3. *Paul brought before the King (Acts 25:23-27).*

The new governor, Festus, had arrived at Caesarea, and then went up to Jerusalem, the capital of the province. The Jews had not forgotten Paul, though they had not attempted another accusation before Felix, knowing that the case was hopeless. But they made at once an effort with the new governor. No sooner had this official made his appearance in Jerusalem than the high priest and the chief of the Jews made a report about Paul. Most likely Festus had not even heard of Paul up to that time. What really took place in Jerusalem, Festus later relates to Agrippa. When Paul was presented to Agrippa, Festus introduced him by saying, "Ye see this man, about whom all the multitude of the Jews have dealt with me both at Jerusalem and also here, crying that he ought not to live any longer" (Acts 25:24). A scene of tumult must have been enacted in Jerusalem when Festus showed himself. The mob clamored for the life of Paul. When they noticed the reluctance of the governor, they concocted another plan. They requested that Paul should be brought to Jerusalem. On the way there they intended to murder him.

But Festus was divinely guided in it all, and when he asked Paul if he would go to Jerusalem, Paul appealed to Caesar. This settled his journey to Rome.

King Agrippa and Bernice paid a visit to the new governor. The father of this king was known as Herod Agrippa, and died under awful circumstances (chapter 12) in the year 44. When his father died Agrippa was in Rome. He was too young to receive the kingdom of his father Herod. Eight years later, Herod, King of Chalcis, the uncle of Agrippa, died. He had married Agrippa's sister Bernice, and Caesar gave Chalcis to Agrippa. Later Agrippa received the title as king. Agrippa I had left three daughters besides this son--Bernice, Marianne and Drusilla, the wife of Felix. Bernice, who was the wife of her uncle, after his death joined her brother Agrippa in Rome. She married a Celician ruler, but deserted him and joined again her brother, in whose company she paid this visit to Caesarea. And Paul appeared before the King. A great audience had gathered and much pomp was displayed. Then the prisoner was brought in. What a contrast! Perhaps they looked upon him with pity as they saw the chain. But more pity must have filled the heart of the great servant of Christ as he saw the poor lost souls bedecked with the miserable tinsel of earth. Festus addressed the King and the whole company. He frankly states what troubled him and that he expects the King to furnish the material for the statements he had, as governor, to send to Rome.

Chapter 26

Verses 1-32

1. *The Address of the Apostle Paul* (Acts 26:2-23).
2. *The Interruption by Festus and the Appeal to the King* (Acts 26:24-29).
3. *The Verdict* (Acts 26:30-32).

The opening words of the Apostle are indeed gracious. Even as he stands in chains the great Apostle counts himself happy. His happiness consisted in the knowledge that he was now privileged to bear witness of His Lord and the Gospel committed to him before such an audience. What an opportunity it was to him, and how he rejoiced that he could speak of Him, whom he served. He also honoured the King by a brief remark in which he expressed his delight in speaking before one who was so well acquainted with Jewish customs and questions. Then he restates his life as a Pharisee.

At once he touches upon the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. Why should it be thought a thing incredible with you, that God should raise the dead? The whole history of Israel bears witness to the fact that God can bring life from the dead. The very origin of the nation demonstrates this, for Sarah's womb was a grave, and God brought life out of that grave. Many promises of the past vouched for God's power to raise the dead. The nation had this promise that spiritual and national death is to give way to spiritual and national life (Ezekiel 37:1-15; Hosea 6:1-3). The resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ proved Him to be the Holy One and the Hope of Israel. In this sense Peter speaks of His resurrection. Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy hath begotten us again to a living hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead" (1 Peter 1:3). The grave of the Lord Jesus was for the disciples the grave of their national hope, but His resurrection from the dead the revival of that hope. Once more he also relates the sad story of how he persecuted the saints. Upon that dark background he can now flash forth again the story of his conversion.

Then the proper moment had arrived to state the Gospel message before this company. It is a terse statement of the message which the Lord had committed unto him. All the elements of the Gospel are contained in the eighteenth verse. There is first the condition of man by nature. Eyes, which are blind, in darkness, under the power of Satan. The eyes are to be opened and through the Gospel man is turned from darkness to light, from the power of Satan unto God. In Colossians 1:12 the same is stated. Then the blessings of conversion. Forgiveness of sins and an inheritance. Faith is the means of all this;

sanctification, that is separation, in conversion “by faith that is in me.” One wonders if the Holy Spirit even then did not bless the message to some heart, and the Grace of God bestowed these blessings upon some believing sinners. It may have been so. The day will make it known.

Festus interrupted him, and when Paul addressed the King directly, he answered him by saying: “Almost persuadest thou me to become a Christian.” The meaning is rather “by a little more persuasion you might make me a Christian.” No doubt conviction had taken hold on him. In this half mocking way he answers the Apostle. How many after him have acted in the same way and rejected the Grace, which stood ready to save.

The verdict of a private consultation is “This Man doeth nothing worthy of death.” Herod Agrippa said unto Festus “This man might have been set at liberty, if he had not appealed unto Caesar.” If Paul had not made his appeal to Caesar he might have then been freed. We have seen before that his appeal to Rome was according to the will of the Lord. To Rome then he goes. All is ordered by a gracious Lord.



Site of the Roman Harbour at Caesarea



Paul's third journey and trip to Rome

Chapter 27

27. Paul's journey to Rome – Caesarea to Malta

Verses 1-6. From Caesarea to Myra

Verses 7-12. From Myra to Crete

Verses 13-44. The storm

Verses 1-44

1. From Caesarea to Fair Havens (Acts 27:1-8).

2. The Unheeded Warning. The Storm. Paul's Vision and Assurance of Safety (Acts 27:9-26).

3. The Shipwreck (Acts 27:27-44).

Much has been written on this Chapter. The voyage of the Apostle Paul to Rome and the shipwreck is often explained as being typical of the stormy voyage of the professing church, her adversities and shipwreck.

However, such an application needs caution. it is easy to make fanciful and far-fetched allegorical applications. Besides church history other lessons have been drawn from this narrative. A recent commentator claims that the keynote to the

interpretation is given in Acts 27:34 in the word salvation. "This and cognate words occur seven times in the chapter: Hope to be saved; ye cannot be saved; to be completely saved. While the contrary fate is no less richly depicted--injury, loss, throwing away, perish, kill and to be cast away. The history, then, is a parable of the great salvation, by which man is brought through death to life." We shall not attempt to seek for an outline of church history in the events of this chapter. The central figure, the prisoner of the Lord, must occupy us more than anything else. It is said that in all the classical literature there is nothing found which gives so much information of the working of an ancient ship as this chapter does. Even the critics have acknowledged that this chapter "bears the most indisputable marks of authenticity." "Historical research and inscriptions have confirmed the facts given in this chapter, while the accuracy of Luke's nautical observations is shown by the great help he has given to our understanding of ancient seamanship. None have impugned the correctness of his phrases; on the contrary, from his description contained in a few sentences, the scene of the wreck has been identified."

The Apostle is courteously treated by the Centurion Julius. Paul may have been in a physically weakened condition. The Lord's gracious and loving care for His faithful servant shines out in this. How clearly the whole narrative shows that all is in His hands: Officers, winds and waves, all circumstances, are under His control. So far all seemed to go well; but contrary winds now trouble the voyagers. The ship is tossed to and fro. If we look upon the ship as a type of the professing church and the little company, headed by Paul, as the true church, then there is no difficulty in seeing the issue. Winds which drive hither and thither trouble those who hold the truth and live in fellowship with the Lord, while the professing church is cast about. Then Myra was reached. Here they took a ship of Alexandria. Danger then threatened. Most likely a consultation of the commander of the ship and the owner, who was on board, and the centurion, was held, and Paul was present. He gives them a solemn warning and cautions them to beware. This shows his close fellowship with the Lord. In prayer, no doubt, he had laid the whole matter before the Lord and received the answer, which he communicates to the persons in authority. They looked upon it as a mere guess, and the centurion rather trusted in the judgment of the captain and the owner.

And here we can think of other warnings given through the great Apostle. Warnings concerning the spiritual dangers, the apostasy of the last days, the perilous times, warnings against the seducing spirits and doctrines of demons. The professing church has forgotten these divinely-given predictions. The world does not heed them. Like these mariners, who believed in their own wisdom and disregarded the warning given, Christendom has paid no attention to these warnings. For this reason the ship is drifting, cast about by every wind of

doctrine and rapidly nearing the long predicted shipwreck. Then there came the terrific tempest. Sun and stars were hidden for many days.

When despair had reached its heights, Paul appears once more upon the scene. When all was hopeless the prisoner of the Lord spoke the words of hope and cheer. He reminds them first of their refusal and disobedience. What had come upon them was the result of having not heeded the warning. He then assures them that an angel of God had assured him once more that he would have to stand before Caesar; but God had given to him all that sail with him. Only the ship is to go down, the lives of all who sail with him will be preserved. "Wherefore, sirs, be of good cheer; for I believe God, that it shall be even so as it hath been spoken unto me." And now they were willing to listen to him. They had to acknowledge their disobedience and believe the message of cheer as it came from the divinely instructed messenger, assuring them of their ultimate salvation.

And so, at least in part, drifting Christendom can listen to the Apostle Paul, and if the mistake, the wrong course, is acknowledged, the heavenly-sent message is accepted, salvation is assured.

How calm the Apostle and his companions must have been after this assurance of their safety. The dreadful winds might continue and the ship drift still further. They knew they were safe, for God had spoken. Different it was with the crew of the ship. In great distress they feared the coming disaster and cast out four anchors. The shipmen attempted flight by a clever scheme. Paul discovered their plan and said to the centurion and soldiers, "Except these abide in the ship, ye (not we) cannot be saved." God had given him all who were in the ship. The work of the sailors was needed when the daybreak came. And the soldiers believed the word of Paul, for they cut the ropes, which set the boat adrift the sailors tried to use. Then Paul exhorted them to eat. Once more he assured them that not a hair should fall from the head of any one. Before the whole company, two hundred and seventy-six persons, Paul took bread and gave thanks to God. The Lord had exalted the prisoner, and he really stands out as the leader of the distressed company. They all became encouraged by the words and action. All has its lessons. However the meal has nothing to do with the Lord's Supper. It tells us typically how necessary it is that we must feed on the bread of life in the days of danger, the times when everything breaks up. "And so it came to pass, that they escaped all safe to land."



Model of a Roman merchant ship of the type in which Paul was transported to Rome

Chapter 28

28:1-16. Malta to Rome

Verses 1-10. Paul in Malta

Verses 11-13. Malta to Puteoli

Verses 14-16. Puteoli to Rome

28: 17-31. Paul in Rome

Verses 17-22. Paul contacts the Jews

Verses 1-31

1. In the Island of Melita (Acts 28:1-10).

2. The arrival in Rome (Acts 28:11-16).

3. Paul calling the chief of the Jews and his message (Acts 28:17-29).

Melita, which means “honey,” is the island of Malta. It was even then a prominent place for navigation where many vessels wintered. Luke calls the inhabitants Barbarians, a term used by the Greeks for all peoples who did not use their language. The wrecked company was not plundered by the people of the island, but instead received much kindness and were made comfortable in the cold rain which fell.

It was God who moved the hearts of these islanders to show such hospitality to the shipwrecked company for the sake of His servants. Paul is active even then. The shipwreck and privations must have told on the great man of God physically, yet we see him going about gathering a bundle of sticks for the fire. This labour must have been difficult, since as a prisoner he wore a chain on his hands. A viper, which had been benumbed by the cold and revived by the heat of the fire, fastened on his hand. We doubt not it was a poisonous viper. This is denied by some critics on the plea that poisonous snakes are not found in the island of Malta. However, that is no proof that such did not exist at that time. The inhabitants of the island expected Paul to fall dead. If it had been a harmless snake, why such an expectation? God’s power was manifested in his behalf. It was a fulfillment of the promise in Mark 16:18 : “they shall take up serpents and it shall not hurt them.” The viper also reminds us of Satan and his fate. As Paul cast the viper into the fire, so Satan will be cast into the lake of fire. Then there was a manifestation of the gracious power of the Lord towards the inhabitants of the island.

And then they reached Rome at last. What joy must have filled his heart and the hearts of the believers in Rome! How often they must have read his words, in the beginning of his letter: “I long to see you, that I may impart unto you some spiritual gift, to the end ye may be established; that is, that I may be comforted together with you by the mutual faith both of you and me. Now, I would not have you ignorant, brethren, that oftentimes I proposed to come unto you (but was hindered hitherto), that I might have some fruit among you also, even as the rest of the Gentiles” (Romans 1:11-13). He had never been in Rome. The Roman assembly was not founded by Paul and certainly not by Peter. The origin of that church is obscure, and the Holy Spirit has not given us a history of the beginning of the church of Rome. And now he whom they all loved, whose face they longed to see, was actually on the way to visit Rome. But in a far different way did he come than he expected when he wrote his Epistle. He came as the prisoner of the Lord. What a meeting it must have been!

And now it is for the very last time in this book, “to the Jew first.” The first service the great Apostle rendered in Rome was not in the assembly, but he called the chief of the Jews together. He knew no bitterness in his heart against the Jews. In writing the letter to the Romans he had written, “I say the truth in

Christ, I lie not, my conscience also testifying with me in the Holy Spirit, that I have great heaviness and continual sorrow in my heart. For I could wish that myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh" (Romans 9:1-2). "Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for them is, that they might be saved" (10:1). And now, after all the sad experience he had made, the treatment he had received from his kinsmen, after he had found out their malice and deep hatred, the same love burns in his heart and the same yearning for their salvation possesses him. In Rome he manifests first of all his loving interest in his Jewish brethren. To these leading Jews he testified once more that he was innocent of any wrong doing. Briefly, he rehearsed his whole case and why he had been compelled to appeal to Caesar. For this purpose--to talk to them about this matter--he had called them. Then most likely he must have lifted his hands, from which the prisoner's chain dangled, and said, "because for the hope of Israel I am bound with this chain." The Jews, however, wanted to hear more from his lips of--"what thou thinkest; for as concerning this sect, we know that everywhere it is spoken against." They knew he believed in Christ.

A great meeting took place a short time later. Many Jews assembled in Paul's lodging. The meeting lasted from morning till evening. Once more he testified the Kingdom of God to a large company of Jews. He also persuaded them concerning Jesus both out of the laws of Moses and out of the Prophets. What a wonderful message must have come from his lips as he unfolded the prophetic testimony concerning the Messiah in the power of the Spirit of God! But what was the result? Some believed and some believed not. They did not agree amongst themselves. The end of God's gracious way with the Jews is reached. We repeat, for the last time, it was to the Jew first. The final crisis is reached. Judgment must now be executed upon the nation and the blindness is now to come, which has lasted so long and will continue till the fullness of the Gentiles is come in (Romans 11:25). Stephen, whose death young Saul had witnessed and approved (8:1), had pronounced judgment upon the nation, in Jerusalem. God's mercy had still waited. Marvellous Grace, which took up the young Pharisee, Saul, and made him the Apostle to the Gentiles! Through him, the chosen instrument, the Lord still sought his beloved Israel, even after Jerusalem had so completely rejected the offered mercy. We have seen how the Apostle's intense love for his brethren had led him back to Jerusalem, though warned repeatedly by the Holy Spirit. And now he is used to give the very last message to the Jews and speak the final word of condemnation.

The salvation of God is now to go far hence to the Gentiles. A prisoner in Rome and yet active. He preached the Kingdom of God (not of heaven, the Jewish, earthly aspect of it), and ever speaking of that worthy name, that blessed and adorable Person, the Lord Jesus Christ. The ending of the book is sad and it is

joyous. Sad to see the great Apostle a prisoner, shut up in Rome with his God-given Gospel. Joyous because the last verse mentions the Lord Jesus Christ and an unhindered ministry of the Gospel. The Book begins with Jerusalem and ends with Rome. It is a prophecy of the course of the professing church. The book closes in an unfinished way, because the acts of Christ, the Spirit of God, and Satan, recorded in this book, are not finished. We hear nothing more of Paul, though we know that from the prison the Holy Spirit of God sent forth through him the blessed Epistles, in which He has been pleased to give us the highest revelation. And how much more might be written on all this!



The Appian Way, the Roman road along which Paul completed his journey to Rome

Archaeology and Paul's arrest

The Quest for the Historical Paul

What can we reliably know about Paul and how can we know it? As is the case with Jesus, this is not an easy question. Historians have been involved in what has been called the "Quest for the Historical Jesus" for the past one hundred and seventy-five years, evaluating and sifting through our sources, trying to determine what we can reliably say about him. As it happens, the quest for the

historical Paul began almost simultaneously, inaugurated by the German scholar Ferdinand Christian Baur almost two centuries ago. Baur put his finger squarely on the problem: There are *four* different “Pauls” in the New Testament, not one, and each is quite distinct from the others. New Testament scholars today are generally agreed on this point.

Thirteen of the New Testament’s twenty-seven documents are letters with Paul’s name as the author, and a fourteenth, the book of Acts, is mainly devoted to the story of Paul’s life and career—making up over half the total text. The problem is, these fourteen texts fall into four distinct chronological tiers, giving us our four “Pauls”:

- 1) *Authentic or Early Paul*: 1 Thessalonians, Galatians, 1 and 2 Corinthians, Romans, Philippians, and Philemon (50s-60s A.D.)
- 2) *Disputed Paul or Deutero-Pauline*: 2 Thessalonians, Ephesians, Colossians (80-100 A.D.)
- 3) *Pseudo-Paul or the Pastorals*: 1 and 2 Timothy, Titus (80-100 A.D.)
- 4) *Tendentious or Legendary Paul*: Acts of the Apostles (90-130 A.D.)

Though scholars differ as to what historical use one might properly make of tiers 2, 3, or 4, there is almost universal agreement that a proper historical study of Paul should begin with the seven genuine letters, restricting one’s analysis to what is most certainly coming from Paul’s own hand. This approach might sound restrictive but it is really the only proper way to begin. The Deutero-Pauline letters, and the Pastorals reflect a vocabulary, a development of ideas, and a social setting that belong to a later time. We are not getting Paul as he was, but Paul’s name used to lend authority to the ideas of later authors who intend for readers to believe they come from Paul. In modern parlance we call such writings forgeries, but a more polite academic term is pseudonymous, meaning “falsely named.”

Those more inclined to view this activity in a positive light point to a group of followers of Paul, some decades after his death, who wanted to honor him by continuing his legacy and using his name to defend views with which they assumed he would have surely agreed. A less charitable judgment is that these letters represent an attempt to deceive gullible readers by authors intent on passing on their own views as having the authority of Paul. Either way, this enterprise of writing letters in Paul’s name has been enormously influential, since Paul became such a towering figure of authority in the church.

The Pastorals (1 and 2 Timothy and Titus) are not included in our earliest extant collection of Paul’s letters, the so-called Chester Beatty papyrus, that dates to

the third century A.D. Paul's apocalyptic urgency, so dominant in the earlier letters, is almost wholly absent in these later writings. Among the Deutero-Pauline tier, 2 Thessalonians was specifically written to calm those who were claiming that the day of judgment was imminent—the very thing Paul constantly proclaimed (2 Thessalonians 2:1-3).

In tiers 2 and 3 the domestic roles of husbands, wives, children, widows, masters, and slaves are specified with a level of detail uncharacteristic of Paul's ad hoc instructions in his earlier letters (Ephesians 5:21-6:9; Colossians 3:18-4:1; 1 Timothy 5:1-16). Specific rules are set down for the qualifications and appointment of bishops and deacons in each congregation (1 Timothy 3:1-13; Titus 1:5-9). There is a strong emphasis on following tradition, respecting the governmental authorities, handling wealth, and maintaining a respectable social order (2 Thessalonians 2:15; 3:6-15; 1 Timothy 2: 1-4; 5:17-19; 6:6-10; Titus 3:1). The Pastorals, in particular, are essentially manuals for church officers, intended to enforce order and uniformity.

Some have argued that the passing of time and the changing of circumstances might account for the differences, but detailed studies of the commonly used vocabulary in Paul's undisputed letters, in contrast to the Deutero-Pauline and Pastoral letters, has settled the question for most scholars. I will make little use of these later documents in trying to reconstruct the "historical Paul."

The book of Acts, tier 4, presents a special problem in that it offers fascinating biographical background on Paul not found in his genuine letters as well as complete itineraries of his travels. The problem, as I mentioned in the Introduction, is with its harmonizing theological agenda that stresses the cozy relationship Paul had with the Jerusalem leaders of the church and its over-idealized heroic portrait of Paul. Many historians are agreed that it merits the label "Use Sparingly with Extreme Caution." As a general working method I have adopted the following three principles:

1. Never accept anything in Acts over Paul's own account in his seven genuine letters.
2. Cautiously consider Acts if it agrees with Paul and one can detect no obvious biases.
3. Consider the independent data Acts provides of interest but not of interpretive historical use.

This latter principle would include biographical information, the three accounts of Paul's conversion that the author provides, the various speeches of Paul, his itinerary, and other such details.

Before applying these principles here is a skeletal outline of Paul's basic biographical data drawn *only* from his genuine letters that gives us a solid place to begin. Here is what we most surely know:

- Paul calls himself a Hebrew or Israelite, stating that he was born a Jew and circumcised on the eighth day, of the Jewish tribe of Benjamin (Philippians 3:5-6; 2 Corinthians 11:22).
- He was once a member of the sect of the Pharisees. He advanced in Judaism beyond many of his contemporaries, being extremely zealous for the traditions of his Jewish faith (Philippians 3:5; Galatians 1:14).
- He zealously persecuted the Jesus movement (Galatians 1:13; Philippians 3:6; 1 Corinthians 15:9).
- Sometime around A.D. 37 Paul had a visionary experience he describes as "seeing" Jesus and received from him his Gospel message as well as his call to be an apostle to the non-Jewish world (1 Corinthians 9:2; Galatians 1:11-2:2).
- He made only three trips to Jerusalem in the period covered by his genuine letters; one three years after his apostolic call when he met Peter and James but none of the other apostles (around A.D. 40); the second fourteen years after his call (A.D. 50) when he appeared formally before the entire Jerusalem leadership to account for his mission and Gospel message to the Gentiles (Galatians 2:1-10), and a third where he was apparently arrested and sent under guard to Rome around A.D. 56 (Romans 15:25-29).
- Paul claimed to experience many revelations from Jesus, including direct voice communications, as well as an extraordinary "ascent" into the highest level of heaven, entering Paradise, where he saw and heard "things unutterable" (2 Corinthians 12:1-4).
- He had some type of physical disability that he was convinced had been sent by Satan to afflict him, but allowed by Christ, so he would not be overly proud of his extraordinary revelations (2 Corinthians 12:7-10).
- He claimed to have worked miraculous signs, wonders, and mighty works that verified his status as an apostle (2 Corinthians 12:12).
- He was unmarried, at least during his career as an apostle (1 Corinthians 7:8, 15; 9:5; Philippians 3:8).

- He experienced numerous occasions of physical persecution and deprivation including beatings, being stoned and left for dead, and shipwrecked (1 Corinthians 3:11-12; 2 Corinthians 11:23-27).
- He worked as a manual laborer to support himself on his travels (1 Corinthians 4:12; 1 Thessalonians 2:9; 1 Corinthians 9:6, 12, 15).
- He was imprisoned, probably in Rome, in the early 60s A.D. and refers to the possibility that he would be executed (Philippians 1:1-26).

This is certainly not all we would want but it is all we have, and considering that we have not a single line written by Jesus or any of his Twelve apostles, having seven of Paul's genuine letters is a poverty of riches.

The book of Acts provides the following independent biographical information not found in the seven genuine letters:

- Paul's Hebrew name was Saul and he was born in Tarsus, a city in the Roman province of Cilicia, in southern Asia Minor or present-day Turkey (Acts 9:11, 30; 11:25; 21:39; 22:3)
- He came from a family of Pharisees and was educated in Jerusalem under the most famous Rabbi of the time, Gamaliel. He also had a sister and a nephew that lived in Jerusalem in the 60s A.D. (Acts 22:3; 23:16)
- He was born a Roman citizen, which means his father also was a Roman citizen. (Acts 16:37; 22:27-28; 23:27)
- He had some official status as a witness consenting to the death of Stephen, the first member of the Jesus movement executed after Jesus (Acts 7:54-8:1). He received an official commission from the high priest in Jerusalem to travel to Damascus in Syria to arrest, imprison, and even have executed any members of the Jesus movement who had fled the city under persecution. It was on the road to Damascus that he had his dramatic heavenly vision of Jesus, who commissioned him as the apostle to the Gentiles. (Acts 9:1-19; 22:3-11; 26:12-18).
- He worked by trade as a "tentmaker," though the Greek word used probably refers a "leather worker" (Acts 18:3).

So what should we make of this material from the book of Acts?

That Paul's Hebrew name was Saul we have no reason to doubt, or that he was from Tarsus in Cilicia, though he never mentions this in his letters. Paul says he is of the tribe of Benjamin, and Saul, the first king of Israel, was also a Benjaminite, so one could see why a Jewish family would choose this particular

name for a favoured son (1 Samuel 9:21). Since Paul reports that he regularly did manual labor to support himself, and Jewish sons were normally taught some trade to supplement their studies, it is possible he was trained as a leather-worker. There is an early rabbinic saying that “He who does not teach his son a trade teaches him banditry.”

Whether Paul was born in Tarsus one has to doubt since Jerome, the fourth century Christian writer, knew a different tradition. He says that Paul’s parents were from Gischala, in Galilee, a Jewish town about twenty-five miles north of Nazareth, and that Paul was born there. According to Jerome, when revolts broke out throughout Galilee following the death of Herod the Great in 4 B.C., Paul and his parents were rounded up and sent to Tarsus in Cilicia as part of a massive exile of the Jewish population by the Romans to rid the area of further potential trouble. Since Jerome certainly knew Paul’s claim, according to the book of Acts, to have been *born* in Tarsus, it is very unlikely he would have contradicted that source without good evidence. Jerome’s account also provides us with the only indication we have as to Paul’s approximate age. Like Jesus, he would have had to have been born before 4 B.C., though how many years earlier we cannot say. This fits rather nicely with Paul’s statement in one of his last letters to a Christian named Philemon, written around A.D. 60, where he refers to himself as a “old man” (Greek *presbyteres*), a word that implies someone who is in his 60s.

Jerome’s account casts serious doubt on the claim in Acts that Paul was born a Roman citizen. We have to question whether a native Galilean family, exiled from Gischala as a result of anti-Roman uprisings in the area, would have had Roman citizenship. We know that Gischala was a hotbed of revolutionary activity and John of Gischala was one of the most prominent leaders in the first Judean Revolt against Rome (A.D. 66-70). Paul also says that he was “beaten three times with rods” (2 Corinthians 11:25). This is a punishment administered by the Romans and was forbidden to one who had citizenship. The earliest document we have from Paul is his letter 1 Thessalonians. It is intensely apocalyptic, with its entire orientation on preparing his group for the imminent arrival of Jesus in the clouds of heaven (1 Thessalonians 1:10; 2:19; 3:13; 4:13-18; 5:1-5, 23). One might imagine Paul the former Pharisee with no apocalyptic orientation whatsoever, but it is entirely possible, if Jerome is correct about his parents being exiled from Galilee in an effort to pacify the area, that Paul’s apocalyptic orientation was one he derived from his family and upbringing. Luke-Acts tends to mute any emphasis on an imminent arrival of the end and he characteristically tones down the apocalyptic themes of Mark, his main narrative source for his Gospel.

Acts is quite keen on emphasizing Paul’s friendly relations with Roman officials as well as the protection they regularly offered Paul from his Jewish enemies, so

claiming that Paul was a Roman citizen, and putting his birth in a Roman Senatorial province like Cilicia, serves the author's purposes.

Acts's claim that Paul grew up in Jerusalem and was a personal student of the famous rabbi Gamaliel is also highly suspect. The book of Acts has an earlier scene, when the apostles Peter and John are arrested by the Jewish authorities who are threatening to have them killed, in which Gamaliel stands up in the Sanhedrin court and speaks in their behalf, recommending their release (Acts 5:33-39). The story is surely fictitious and is part of the author's attempt to indicate to his Roman audience that reasonable minded Jews, like noble Roman officials, did not condemn the Christians. It is likely that the author of Acts, in making Paul an honored student of Gamaliel, the most revered Pharisee of the day, is wanting to further advance this perspective. Throughout his account he constantly characterizes the Jewish enemies of Paul as irrational and rabid, in contrast to those "good" Jews who are calm, reasonable, and respond favorably to Paul (Acts 13:45; 18:12; 23:12).

Whether Paul even lived in Jerusalem before his visionary encounter with Christ could be questioned. In Acts it is a given, but Paul never indicates in any of his letters that Jerusalem was his home as a young man. He does mention twice a connection with Damascus, the capital of the Roman province of Syria (2 Corinthians 11:32; Galatians 1:17). Whether he was in Damascus, which is 150 miles northwest of Jerusalem, in pursuit of Jesus' followers, or for other reasons, we have no sure way of knowing. The account in Acts of Paul's conversion, repeated three times, that has Paul sent as an authorized delegate of the High Priest in Jerusalem to arrest Christians in Damascus, has so coloured our assumptions about Paul that it is hard to focus on what we find in his letters.

Paul connection to Jerusalem, or the lack thereof, has much to do with the oft-discussed question of whether Paul would have ever seen or heard Jesus, or could he have been a witness to Jesus' crucifixion in A.D. 30. Since he never mentions seeing Jesus in any of his letters, and one would expect that had he been an eyewitness to the events of that Passover week he surely would have drawn upon such a vivid experience, this argues against the idea that he was a Jerusalem resident at that time.

Likewise, Paul's high placed connections to the Jewish priestly class in Jerusalem we can neither confirm nor deny. All he tells us is that he zealously persecuted the church of God and tried to destroy it (Galatians 1:12). Some translations have used the English word "violently," but this is misleading and serves to reinforce the account in Acts that Paul was delivering people over to execution. The Greek word Paul uses (*hyperbole*) means "excessively" or zealously. We take Paul's word that he identified himself as a Pharisee, but there

is nothing in his letters to indicate the kind of prominent connections that the author of Acts gives him.

Outside the New Testament

Our earliest physical description of Paul comes from a late second-century Christian writing *The Acts of Paul and Thecla*. It is a wildly embellished and legendary account of Paul's travels, his wondrously miraculous feats, and his formidable influence in persuading others to believe in Christ. The story centers on the beautiful and wealthy virgin Thecla, a girl so thoroughly mesmerized by Paul's preaching that she broke off her engagement to follow Paul and experienced many adventures. As Paul is first introduced one of his disciples sees him coming down the road:

And he saw Paul coming, a man small of stature, with a bald head and crooked legs, in a good state of body, with eyebrows meeting and nose somewhat hooked, full of friendliness; for now he appeared like a man, and now he had the face of an angel.

We have no reason to believe this account is based on any historical recollection since the *Acts of Paul* as a whole shows no trace of earlier sources or historical reference points. The somewhat unflattering portrait most likely stemmed from allusions in Paul's letters to his "bodily presence" being unimpressive and the subject of scorn, whereas his followers received him as an angel (2 Corinthians 10:10; Galatians 4:13-14).

It might come as a surprise, but outside our New Testament records we have very little additional historical information about Paul other than the valuable tradition that Jerome preserves for us that he was born in the Galilee. The early Christian writers of the second century (usually referred to as the "Apostolic Fathers") mention his name less than a dozen times, holding him up as an example of heroic faith, but nothing of historical interest is related by any of them. For example, Ignatius, the early second century bishop of Antioch writes:

For neither I nor anyone like me can keep pace with the wisdom of the blessed and glorious Paul, who, when he was among you in the presence of the men of that time, accurately and reliably taught the word concerning the truth.

Some of the second and third century Christian writers know the tradition that both Peter and Paul ended up in Rome and were martyred during the reign of the emperor Nero—Paul was beheaded and Peter was crucified. The apocryphal *Acts of Peter*, an extravagantly legendary account dating to the third or fourth century A.D., explains that Peter insisted on being crucified upside-down so as to show his unworthiness to die in the same manner as Jesus.

Ironically it seems that we moderns, using our tools of critical historical research, are in a better position than the Christians of the second and third centuries to recover a more authentic Paul.

Chapters 21:16-28:31

Paul's Arrest in Jerusalem and Journey to Rome

Acts 21:16-25 - Some of the disciples from Caesarea accompanied us and they brought us to the house of Mnason, a native of Cyprus and one of the earliest disciples, with whom we were going to stay. On our arrival at Jerusalem the brothers gave us a very warm welcome. On the following day Paul went with us to visit James, and all the elders were present. When he had greeted them he gave them a detailed account of all that God had done among the Gentiles through his ministry, and they, on hearing this account, glorified God. Then they said to him, "You know, brother, how many thousands there are among the Jews who have become believers, and that every one of these is a staunch upholder of the Law. They have been told about you - that you teach all Jews who live among the Gentiles to disregard the Law of Moses, and tell them not to circumcise their children nor observe the old customs. What will happen now, for they are simply bound to hear that you have arrived? Now why not follow this suggestion of ours? We have four men here under a vow. Suppose you join them and be purified with them, pay their expenses so that they may have their hair cut short, and then everyone will know there is no truth in the stories about you, but that you yourself observe the Law. As for those Gentiles who have believed, we have sent them a letter with our decision that they should abstain from what has been offered to idols, from blood and from what has been strangled, and from sexual immorality"

But his enemies attempt to murder him

Acts 21:26-30 - So Paul joined the four men and on the following day, after being purified with them, went into the Temple to give notice of the time when the period of purification would be finished and an offering would be made on behalf of each one of them. The seven days were almost over when the Jews from Asia caught sight of Paul in the Temple. They stirred up the whole crowd and seized him, shouting, "Men of Israel, help! This is the man who is teaching everybody everywhere to despise our people, our Law and this place. Why, he has even brought Greeks into the Temple and he has defiled this holy place!" For they had previously seen Trophimus the Ephesian with Paul in the city and they had concluded that Paul had brought him into the Temple. The whole city was stirred by this speech and a mob collected who seized Paul and dragged him outside the Temple, and the doors were slammed behind him.

Paul is rescued by Roman soldiers

Acts 21:31-37 - They were trying to kill him when a report reached the ears of the colonel of the regiment that the whole of Jerusalem was in an uproar. Without a moment's delay he took soldiers and centurions and ran down to them. When they saw the colonel and the soldiers they stopped beating Paul. The colonel came up to Paul and arrested him and ordered him to be bound with two chains. Then he enquired who the man was and what he had been doing. Some of the crowd shouted one thing and some another, and since he could not be certain of the facts because of the shouting that was going on, the colonel ordered him to be brought to the barracks. When Paul got to the steps he was actually carried by the soldiers because of the violence of the mob. For the mass of the people followed, shouting, "Kill him!" Just as they were going to take him into the barracks Paul asked the colonel, "May I say something to you?"

Acts 21:38 - "So you know Greek, do you?" the colonel replied. "Aren't you that Egyptian who not long ago raised a riot and led those four thousand assassins into the desert?"

Acts 21:39 - "I am a Jew," replied Paul. "I am a man of Tarsus, a citizen of that not insignificant city. I ask you to let me speak to the people."

Paul attempts to defend himself

Acts 21:40 - On being given permission Paul stood on the steps and made a gesture with his hand to the people. There was a deep hush as he began to speak to them in Hebrew.

Chapter 22

Acts 22:1 - "My brothers and my fathers, listen to what I have to say in my own defence."

Acts 22:2 - As soon as they heard him addressing them in Hebrew the silence became intense.

Acts 22:3-16 - "I myself am a Jew," Paul went on. "I was born in Tarsus in Cilicia, but I was brought up here in the city, I received my training at the feet of Gamaliel and I was schooled in the strictest observance of our father's Law. I was as much on fire with zeal for God as you all are today. I am also the man who persecuted this way to the death, arresting both men and women and throwing them into prison, as the High Priest and the whole council can readily testify. Indeed, it was after receiving letters from them to their brothers in Damascus that I was on my way to that city, intending to arrest any followers of

the way I could find there and bring them back to Jerusalem for punishment. Then this happened to me. As I was on my journey and getting near to Damascus, about midday a great light from Heaven suddenly blazed around me. I fell to the ground, and I heard a voice saying to me, 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?' I replied, 'Who are you, Lord?' He said to me, 'I am Jesus of Nazareth whom you are persecuting.' My companions naturally saw the light, but they did not hear the voice of the one who was talking to me. 'What am I to do Lord?' I asked. And the Lord told me, 'Get up and go to Damascus and there you will be told of all that has been determined for you to do.' I was blinded by the brightness of the light and my companions had to take me by the hand as we went on to Damascus. There, there was a man called Ananias, a reverent observer of the Law and a man highly respected by all the Jews who lived there. He came to visit me and as he stood by my side said, 'Saul, brother, you may see again!' At once I regained my sight and looked up to him. 'The God of our fathers,' he went on, 'has chosen you to know his will, to see the righteous one, to hear words from his own lips, so that you may become his witness before all men of what you have seen and heard. And now what are you waiting for? Get up and be baptised! Be clean from your sins as you call on his name.'

Paul claims that God sent him to the Gentiles

Acts 22:17-21 - "Then it happened that after my return to Jerusalem, while I was at prayer in the Temple, unconscious of everything else, I saw him, and he said to me, 'Make haste and leave Jerusalem at once, for they will not accept your testimony about me.' And I said, 'But, Lord, they know how I have been through all the synagogues imprisoning and beating all those who believe in you. They know also that when the blood of your martyr Stephen was shed I stood by, giving my approval - why, I was even holding in my arms, the outer garments of those who killed him.' But he said to me, 'Go, for I will send you far away to the Gentiles'."

The consequence of Paul's speech

Acts 22:22 - They had listened to him until he said this, but now they raised a great shout, "Kill him, and rid the earth of such a man! He is not fit to live!"

Acts 22:23-25 - As they were yelling and ripping their clothes and hurling dust into the air, the colonel gave orders to bring Paul into the barracks and directed that he should be examined by scourging, so that he might discover the reason for such an uproar against him. But when they had strapped him up, Paul spoke to the centurion standing by, "Is it legal for you to flog a man who is a Roman citizen, and untried at that?"

Acts 22:26 - On hearing this the centurion went in to the colonel and reported to him, saying, "Do you realise what you were about to do? This man is a Roman citizen!"

Acts 22:27 - Then the colonel himself came up to Paul, and said, "Tell me, are you a Roman citizen?" And he said, "Yes."

Acts 22:28 - Whereupon the colonel replied, "It cost me a good deal to get my citizenship." "Ah," replied Paul, "but I was born a citizen."

Acts 22:29 - Then those who had been about to examine him left hurriedly, while even the colonel himself was alarmed at discovering that Paul was a Roman and that he had had him bound.

Roman fair-mindedness

Acts 22:30 - Next day the colonel, determined to get to the bottom of Paul's accusation by the Jews, released him and ordered the assembly of the chief priests and the whole Sanhedrin. Then he took Paul down and placed him in front of them.

Chapter 23

Paul again attempts defence

Acts 23:1-3 - Paul looked steadily at the Sanhedrin and spoke to them, "men and brothers, I have lived my life with a perfectly clear conscience before God up to the present day -" Then Ananias the High Priest ordered those who were standing near to strike him in the mouth. At this Paul said to him, "God will strike you, you white-washed wall! How dare you sit there judging me by the Law and give orders for me to be struck, which is clean contrary to the Law?"

Acts 23:4 - Those who stood by said, "Do you mean to insult God's High Priest?"

Acts 23:5 - But Paul said, "My brothers, I did not know that he was the High Priest, for it is written: 'You shall not speak evil of the ruler of your people.'"

Paul seizes his opportunity

Acts 23:6 - Then Paul, realising that part of the council were Sadducees and the other part Pharisees, raised his voice and said to them, "I am a Pharisee, the son of Pharisees. It is for my hope in the resurrection of the dead that I am on trial!"

Acts 23:7-9a - At these words an immediate tension arose between the Pharisees and the Sadducees, and the meeting was divided. For the Sadducees claim that there is no resurrection and that there is neither angel nor spirit, while the Pharisees believe in all three. A great uproar ensued and some of the scribes of the Pharisees' party jumped to their feet and protested violently.

Acts 23:9b - "We find nothing wrong with this man! Suppose some angel or spirit has really spoken to him?"

Acts 23:10 - As the tension mounted the colonel began to fear that Paul would be torn to pieces between them. He therefore ordered his soldiers to come down and rescue him from them and bring him back to the barracks.

God's direct encouragement to Paul

Acts 23:11 - That night the Lord stood by Paul, and said, "Take heart! - for as you have witnessed boldly for me in Jerusalem so you must give your witness to me in Rome."

Paul's acute danger

Acts 23:12-15 - Early in the morning the Jews made a conspiracy and bound themselves by a solemn oath that they would neither eat nor drink until they had killed Paul. Over forty of them were involved in the plot, and they approached the chief priests and elders, and said, "We have bound ourselves by a solemn oath to let nothing pass our lips until we have killed Paul. Now you and the council must make it plain to the colonel that you want him to bring Paul down to you, suggesting that you want to examine his case more closely. We shall be standing by ready to kill him before he gets here."

Leakage of information leads to Paul's protection

Acts 23:16-17 - However, Paul's nephew got wind of this plot and he came and found his way into the barracks and told Paul about it. Paul called one of the centurions and said, "Take this young man to the colonel for he has something to report to him."

Acts 23:18 - So the centurion took him and brought him into the colonel's presence, and said, "The prisoner Paul called me and requested that this young man should be brought to you as he has something to say to you."

Acts 23:19 - The colonel took his hand, and drew him aside (where they could not be overheard), and asked, "What have you got to tell me?"

Acts 23:20-21 - And he replied, "The Jews have agreed to ask you to bring Paul down to the Sanhedrin tomorrow as though they were going to enquire more carefully into his case. But I beg you not to let them persuade you. For more than forty of them are waiting for him - they have sworn a solemn oath that they will neither eat nor drink until they have killed him. They are all ready at this moment - all they want is for you to give the order."

Acts 23:22 - At this the colonel dismissed the young man with the caution, "Don't let a soul know that you have given me this information."

Acts 23:23-24 - Then he summoned two of his centurions, and said, "Get two hundred men ready to proceed to Caesarea, with seventy horsemen and two hundred spearmen, by nine o'clock tonight." (Mounts were also to be provided to carry Paul safely to Felix the governor.)

The Roman view of Paul's position

Acts 23:25-30 - He further wrote a letter to Felix of which this is a copy: "Claudius Lysias sends greeting to his excellency the governor Felix. "This man had been seized by the Jews and was on the point of being murdered by them when I arrived with my troops and rescued him, since I had discovered that he was a Roman citizen. Wishing to find out what the accusation was that they were making against him, I had him brought down to their Sanhedrin. There I discovered he was being accused over questions of their laws, and that there was no charge against him which deserved either death or imprisonment. Now, however, that I have received private information of a plot against his life, I have sent him to you without delay. At the same time I have notified his accusers that they must make their charges against him in your presence."

Paul is taken into protective custody

Acts 23:31-35 - The soldiers, acting on their orders, took Paul and, riding through that night, brought him down to Antipatris. Next day they returned to the barracks, leaving the horsemen to accompany him further. They went into Caesarea and after delivering the letter to the governor, they handed Paul over to him. When the governor had read the letter he asked Paul what province he came from, and on learning that he came from Cilicia, he said, "I will hear your case as soon as your accusers arrive." Then he ordered him to be kept under guard in Herod's palace.

Chapter 24

The "professional" puts his case against Paul

Acts 24:1-8 - Five days later Ananias the High Priest came down himself with some of the elders and a barrister by the name of Tertullus. They presented their case against Paul before the governor, and when Paul had been summoned, Tertullus began the prosecution in these words: "We owe it to you personally, your excellency, that we enjoy lasting peace, and we know that it is due to your foresight that the nation enjoys improved conditions of living. At all times, and indeed everywhere, we acknowledge these things with the deepest gratitude. However - for I must not detain you too long - I beg you to give us a brief hearing with your customary kindness. The simple fact is that we have found this man a pestilential disturber of the peace among the Jews all over the world. He is a ringleader of the Nazareth sect, and he was on the point of desecrating the Temple when we overcame him. But you yourself will soon discover from the man himself all the facts about which we are accusing him."

Paul is given the chance to defend himself

Acts 24:9-10a - While Tertullus was speaking the Jews kept joining in, asserting that these were the facts. Then Paul, at a nod from the governor made his reply:

Acts 24:10b-16 - "I am well aware that you have been governor of this nation for many years, and I can therefore make my defence with every confidence. You can easily verify the fact that it is not more than twelve days ago that I went up to worship at Jerusalem. I was never found either arguing with anyone in the Temple or gathering a crowd, either in the synagogues or in the open air. These men are quite unable to prove the charges they are now making against me. I will freely admit to you, however, that I do worship the God of our fathers according to the Way which they call a heresy, although in fact I believe in the scriptural authority of both the Law and the Prophets. I have the same hope in God which they themselves hold, that there is to be a resurrection of both good men and bad. With this hope before me I do my utmost to live my whole life with a clear conscience before God and man.

Paul has nothing to hide

Acts 24:17-21 - "It was in fact after several years' absence from Jerusalem that I came back to make charitable gifts to my own nation and to make my offerings. It was in the middle of these duties that they found me, a man purified in the Temple. There was no mob and there was no disturbance until the Jews from Asia came, who should in my opinion have come before you and made their accusation, if they had anything against me. Or else, let these men themselves speak out now and say what crime they found me guilty of when I stood before the Sanhedrin - unless it was that one sentence that I shouted as I stood among them. All I said was this, 'It is about the resurrection of the dead that I am on trial before you this day'."

Felix defers decision

Acts 24:22 - Then Felix, who was better acquainted with the Way than most people, adjourned the case and said, "As soon as Colonel Lysias arrives I will give you my decision."

Acts 24:23 - Then he gave orders to the centurion to keep Paul in custody, but to grant him reasonable liberty and allow any of his personal friends to look after his needs.

Felix plays for safety - and hope for personal gain

Acts 24:24-25 - Some days later Felix arrived with his wife Drusilla, herself a Jewess and sent for Paul, and heard what he had to say about faith in Christ Jesus. But while Paul was talking about goodness, self-control and the judgment that is to come, Felix became alarmed, and said, "You may go for the present. When I find a convenient moment I will send for you again."

Acts 24:26 - At the same time he nursed a secret hope that Paul would pay him money - which is why Paul was frequently summoned to come and talk with him.

Acts 24:27 - However, when two full years had passed, Felix was succeeded by Porcius Festus and, as he wanted to remain in favour with the Jews, he left Paul still a prisoner.

Chapter 25

Felix's successor begins his duties with vigour -

Chapter 25:1-4 - Three days after Festus had taken over his province he went up from Caesarea to Jerusalem. The chief priests and elders of the Jews informed him of the case against Paul and begged him as a special favour to have Paul sent to Jerusalem. They themselves had already made a plot to kill him on the way. But Festus replied that Paul was in custody in Caesarea, and that he himself was going there shortly.

Chapter 25:5 - "What you must do," he told them, "is to provide some competent men of your own to go down with me and if there is anything wrong with the man they can present their charges against him."

Chapter 25:6-8 - Festus spent not more than eight or ten days among them at Jerusalem and then went down to Caesarea. On the day after his arrival he took his seat on the bench and ordered Paul to be brought in. As soon as he arrived

the Jews from Jerusalem stood up on all sides of him, bringing forward many serious accusations which they were quite unable to substantiate. Paul, in his defence, maintained, "I have committed no offence in any way against the Jewish Law, or against the Temple or against Caesar."

But is afraid of antagonising the Jews

Acts 25:9 - But Festus, wishing to gain the goodwill of the Jews, spoke direct to Paul, "Are you prepared to go up to Jerusalem and stand your trial over these matters in my presence there?"

Acts 25:10-11 - But Paul replied, "I am standing in Caesar's court and that is where I should be judged. I have done the Jews no harm, as you very well know. It comes to this: if I were a criminal and had committed some crime which deserved the death penalty, I should not try to evade sentence of death. But as in fact there is no truth in the accusations these men have made, I am not prepared to be used as a means of gaining their favour - I appeal to Caesar!"

Acts 25:12 - Then Festus, after a conference with his advisers, replied to Paul, "You have appealed to Caesar - then to Caesar you shall go!"

Festus outlines Paul's case to Agrippa

Acts 25:13-14 - Some days later King Agrippa and Bernice arrived at Caesarea on a state visit to Festus. They prolonged their stay for some days and this gave Festus an opportunity of laying Paul's case before the king.

Acts 25:15-21 - "I have a man," he said, "who was left a prisoner by Felix. When I was in Jerusalem the chief priests and Jewish elders made allegations against him and demanded his conviction! I told them that the Romans were not in the habit of giving anybody up to please anyone, until the accused had had the chance of facing his accusers personally and been given the opportunity of defending himself on the charges made against him. Since these Jews came back here with me, I wasted no time but on the very next day I took my seat on the bench and ordered the man to be brought in. But when his accusers got up to speak they did not charge him with any such crimes as I had anticipated. Their differences with him were about their own religion and concerning a certain Jesus who had died, but whom Paul claimed to be still alive. I did not feel qualified to investigate such matters and so I asked the man if he were willing to go to Jerusalem and stand his trial over these matters there. But when he appealed to have his case reserved for the decision of the emperor himself, I ordered him to be kept in custody until such time as I could send him to Caesar."

Acts 25:22 - Then Agrippa said to Festus, "I have been wanting to hear this man myself" "Then you shall hear him tomorrow," replied Festus.

Festus formally explains Paul's case to Agrippa

Acts 25:23-27 - When the next day came, Agrippa and Bernice proceeded to the audience chamber with great pomp and ceremony, with an escort of military officers and prominent townsmen. Festus ordered Paul to be brought in and then he spoke: "King Agrippa and all who are present, you see here the man about whom the whole Jewish people both at Jerusalem and in this city have petitioned me. They din it into my ears that he ought not to live any longer, but I for my part discovered nothing that he has done which deserves the death penalty. And since he has appealed to Caesar, I have decided to send him to Rome. Frankly, I have nothing specific to write to the emperor about him, and I have therefore brought him forward before you all, and especially before you, King Agrippa, so that from your examination of him there may emerge some charge which I may put in writing. For it seems ridiculous to me to send a prisoner before the emperor without indicating the charges against him."

Chapter 26

Acts 26:1 - Then Agrippa said to Paul, "You have our permission to speak for yourself."

Paul repeats his story on a state occasion

Acts 26:2-3 - So Paul, with that characteristic gesture of the hand, began his defence: "King Agrippa, in answering all the charges that the Jews have made against me, I must say how fortunate I consider myself to be in making my defence before you personally today. For I know that you are thoroughly familiar with all the customs and disputes that exist among the Jews. I therefore ask you to listen to me patiently.

Acts 26:4-18 - "The fact that I lived from my youth upwards among my own people in Jerusalem is well known to all Jews. They have known all the time, and could witness to the fact if they wished, that I lived as a Pharisee according to the strictest sect of our religion. Even today I stand here on trial because of a hope that I hold in a promise that God made to our forefather - a promise for which our twelve tribes served God zealously day and night, hoping to see it fulfilled. It is about this hope, your majesty, that I am being accused by the Jews! Why does it seem incredible to you all that God should raise the dead? I once thought it my duty to oppose with the utmost vigour the name of Jesus of Nazareth. Yes, that is what I did in Jerusalem, and I had many of God's people imprisoned on the authority of the chief priests, and when they were on trial for

their lives I gave my vote against them. Many and many a time in all the synagogues I had them punished and I used to try and force them to deny their Lord. I was mad with fury against them, and I hounded them to distant cities. Once, your majesty, on my way to Damascus on this business, armed with the full authority and commission of the chief priests, at midday I saw a light from Heaven, far brighter than the sun, blazing about me and my fellow-travellers. We all fell to the ground and I heard a voice saying to me in Hebrew, 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me? It is not for you to kick against your own conscience.' 'Who are you, Lord?' I said. And the Lord said to me, 'I am Jesus whom you are persecuting. Now get up and stand on your feet for I have shown myself to you for a reason - you are chosen to be my servant and a witness to what you have seen of me today, and of other visions of myself which I will give you. I will keep you safe from both your own people and from the Gentiles to whom I now send you. I send you to open their eyes, to turn them from darkness to light, from the power of Satan to God himself, so that they may know forgiveness of their sins and take their place with all those who are made holy by their faith in me.'

Acts 26:19-23 - After that, King Agrippa, I could not disobey the heavenly vision. But both in Damascus and in Jerusalem, through the whole of Judea, and to the Gentiles, I preached that men should repent and turn to God and live lives to prove their change of heart. This is why the Jews seized me in the Temple and tried to kill me. To this day I have received help from God himself, and I stand here as a witness to high and low, adding nothing to what the prophets foretold should take place, that is, that Christ should suffer, that he should be first to rise from the dead, and so proclaim the message of light both to our people and to the Gentiles!"

Festus concludes that Paul's enthusiasm is insanity

Acts 26:24 - While he was thus defending himself Festus burst out, "You are raving, Paul! All your learning has driven you mad!"

Acts 26:25-27 - But Paul replied, "I am not mad, your excellency. I speak nothing but sober truth. The king knows of these matters, and I can speak freely before him. I cannot believe that any of these matters has escaped his notice, for it has been no hole-and-corner business. King Agrippa, do you believe the prophets? But I know that you believe them."

Acts 26:28 - "Much more of this, Paul," returned Agrippa, "and you will be making me a Christian!"

Acts 26:29 - "Ah," returned Paul, "whether it means 'much more' or 'only a little', I would to God that both you and all who can hear me this day might stand where I stand - but without these chains."

The Roman officials consider Paul innocent

Acts 26:30-31 - Then the king rose to his feet and so did the governor and Bernice and those sitting with them, and when they had retired from the assembly they discussed the matter among themselves and agreed, "This man is doing nothing to deserve either death or imprisonment."

Acts 26:32 - Agrippa remarked to Festus, "He might easily have been discharged if he had not appealed to Caesar."

Chapter 27

The last journey begins



Following the arrest of Paul in Jerusalem (1) and two year imprisonment in Caesarea (2) around AD58-60, he makes his journey to Rome in AD61

Acts 27:1-9 - As soon as it was decided that we should sail away to Italy, Paul and some other prisoners were put in charge of a centurion named Julius, of the emperor's own regiment. We embarked on a ship hailing from Adramyttium, bound for the Asian ports, and set sail. Among our company was Aristarchus, a Macedonian from Thessalonica. On the following day we put in at Sidon, where Julius treated Paul most considerately by allowing him to visit his friends and

accept their hospitality. From Sidon we put to sea again and sailed to leeward of Cyprus, since the wind was against us. Then, when we had crossed the gulf that lies off the coasts of Cilicia and Pamphylia, we arrived at Myra in Lycia. There the centurion found an Alexandrian ship bound for Italy and put us aboard her. . For several days we beat slowly up to windward and only just succeeded in arriving off Cnidus. Then, since the wind was still blowing against us, we sailed under the lee of Crete, and rounded Cape Salmone. Coasting along with difficulty we came to a place called Fair Havens, near which is the city of Lasea. We had by now lost a great deal of time and sailing had already become dangerous as it was so late in the year.

Paul's warning is disregarded

Acts 27:10 - So Paul warned them, and said, "Men, I can see that this voyage is likely to result in damage and considerable loss - not only to ship and cargo - but even of our lives as well."

Acts 27:11-20 - But Julius paid more attention to the helmsman and the captain than to Paul's words of warning. Moreover, since the harbour is unsuitable for a ship to winter in, the majority were in favour of setting sail again in the hope of reaching Phoenix and wintering there. Phoenix is a harbour in Crete, facing south-west and north-west. So, when a moderate breeze sprang up, thinking they had obtained just what they wanted, they weighed anchor, and coasted along, hugging the shores of Crete. But before long a terrific gale, which they called a north-easter, swept down upon us from the land. The ship was caught by it and since she could not be brought up into the wind we had to let her fall off and run before it. Then, running under the lee of a small island called Clauda, we managed with some difficulty to secure the ship's boat. After hoisting it aboard they used cables to brace the ship. To add to the difficulties they were afraid all the time of drifting on to the Syrtis banks, so they shortened sail and lay to, drifting. The next day, as we were still at the mercy of the violent storm, they began to throw cargo overboard. On the third day with their own hands they threw the ship's tackle over the side. Then, when for many days there was no glimpse of sun or stars and we were still in the grip of the gale, all hope of our being saved was given up.

Paul's practical courage and faith

Acts 27:21-26 - Nobody had eaten for some time, when Paul came forward among the men and said, "Men, you should have listened to me and not set sail from Crete and suffered this damage and loss. However, now I beg you to keep up your spirits for no one's life is going to be lost, though we shall lose the ship. I know this because last night, the angel of the God to whom I belong, and whom I serve, stood by me and said, 'Have no fear, Paul! You must stand before

Caesar. And God, as a mark of his favour towards you, has granted you the lives of those who are sailing with you.' Take courage then, men, for I believe God, and I am certain that everything will happen exactly as I have been told. But we shall have to run the ship ashore on some island."

At last we near land

Acts 27:27-31 - On the fourteenth night of the storm, as we were drifting in the Adriatic, about midnight the sailors sensed that we were nearing land. Indeed, when they sounded they found twenty fathoms, and then after sailing on only a little way they sounded again and found fifteen. So, for fear that we might be hurled on the rocks, they threw out four anchors from the stern and prayed for daylight. The sailors wanted to desert the ship and they got as far as letting down a boat into the sea, pretending that they were going to run out anchors from the bow. But Paul said to the centurion and the soldiers, "Unless these men stay aboard the ship there is no hope of your being saved."

Acts 27:32 - At this the soldiers cut the ropes of the boat and let her fall away.

Paul's sturdy commonsense

Acts 27:33-34 - Then while everyone waited for the day to break Paul urged them to take some food, saying, "For a fortnight now you've had no food - you haven't had a bite while you've been on watch. Now take some food, I beg of you - you need it for your own well-being, for not a hair of anyone's head will be lost."

Acts 27:35-38 - When he had said this he took some bread and, after thanking God before them all, he broke it and began to eat. This raised everybody's spirits and they began to take food themselves. There were about two hundred and seventy-six of us all told aboard that ship. When they had eaten enough they lightened the ship by throwing the grain over the side.

Land at last - but we lose the ship

Acts 27:39-44 - When daylight came no one recognised the land. But they made out a bay with a sandy shore where they planned to beach the ship if they could. So they cut away the anchors and left them in the sea, and at the same time cut the ropes which held the steering-oars. Then they hoisted the foresail to catch the wind and made for the beach. But they struck a shoal and the ship ran aground. The bow stuck fast, while the stern began to break up under the strain. The soldiers' plan had been to kill the prisoners in case any of them should try to swim to shore and escape. But the centurion, in his desire to save Paul, put a stop to this, and gave orders that all those who could swim should jump

overboard first and get to land, while the rest should follow, some on planks and other on the wreckage of the ship. So it came true that everyone reached the shore in safety.

Chapter 28

A small incident establishes Paul's reputation

Acts 28:1-6 - After our escape we discovered that the island was called Melita. The natives treated us with uncommon kindness. Because of the driving rain and cold they lit a fire and made us all welcome. Then when Paul had collected a large bundle of sticks and was about to put it on the fire, a viper driven out by the heat fastened itself on his hand. When the natives saw the creature hanging from his hand they said to each other, "This man is obviously a murderer. He has escaped from the sea but justice will not let him live." But Paul shook off the viper into the fire without suffering any ill effect. Naturally they expected him to swell up or suddenly fall down dead, but after waiting a long time and seeing nothing untoward happen to him, they changed their minds and kept saying he was a god.

Paul's acts of healing: the islanders' gratitude

Acts 28:7-10 - In that part of the island were estates belonging to the governor, whose name was Publius. This man welcomed us and entertained us most kindly for three days. Now it happened that Publius' father was lying ill with fever and dysentery. Paul visited him and after prayer laid his hands on him and healed him. After that all the other sick people on the island came forward and were cured. Consequently they loaded us with presents, and when the time came for us to sail they provided us with everything we needed.

Spring returns and we resume our journey

Acts 28:11-14 - It was no less than three months later that we set sail in an Alexandrian ship which had wintered in the island, a ship that had the heavenly twins as her figurehead. We put in at Syracuse and stayed there three days, and from there we tacked round to Rhegium. A day later the south wind sprang up and we sailed to Puteoli, reaching it in only two days. There we found some of the brothers and they begged us to stay a week with them, and so we finally came to Rome.

A Christian welcome awaits us in the capital

Acts 28:15 - The brothers there had heard about us and came out from the city to meet us, as far as the Market of Appius and the Three Taverns. When Paul saw them he thanked God and his spirits rose.

Acts 28:16 - When we reached Rome Paul was given permission to live alone with the soldier who was guarding him.

Paul explains himself frankly to the Jews in Rome

Acts 28:17-20 - Three days later Paul invited the leading Jews to meet him, and when they arrived he spoke to them, "Men and brothers, although I have done nothing against our people or the customs of our forefathers, I was handed over to the Romans as a prisoner in Jerusalem. They examined me and were prepared to release me, since they found me guilty of nothing deserving the death penalty. But the attacks of the Jews there forced me to appeal to Caesar - not that I had any charge to make against my own nation. But it is because of this accusation of the Jews that I have asked to see you and talk matters over with you. In actual fact it is on account of the hope of Israel that I am here in chains."

Acts 28:21-22 - But they replied, "We have received no letters about you from Judea, nor have any of the brothers who have arrived here said anything, officially or unofficially, against you. We want to hear you state your views, although as far as this sect is concerned we do know that serious objections have been raised to it everywhere.

Paul's earnest and prolonged effort to win his own people for Christ

Acts 28:23a - When they had arranged a day for him they came to his lodging in great numbers.

Acts 8:23b-27 - From morning till evening he explained the kingdom of God to them, giving his personal testimony, trying to persuade them about Jesus from the Law of Moses and the Prophets. As a result several of them were won over by his words, but others would not believe. When they could not reach any agreement among themselves and began to go away, Paul added as a parting shot, "how rightly did the Holy Spirit speak to your forefathers through the prophet Isaiah when he said, 'Go to the people and say, Hearing you will hear, and shall not understand; and seeing you will see, and not perceive; for the heart of this people has grown dull. Their ears are hard of hearing, and their eyes they have closed, lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears, lest they should understand with their heart and turn, so that I should heal them.'

Acts 28:28 - "Let it be plainly understood then that this salvation of our God has been sent to the Gentiles, and they at least will listen to it!"

The last glimpse of Paul ...

Acts 28:29-31 - So Paul stayed for two full years in his own rented apartment welcoming all who came to see him. He proclaimed to them all the kingdom of God and gave them the teaching of the Lord Jesus Christ with the utmost freedom and without hindrance from anyone.

Timeline of the Apostle Paul's Life

Note: The chronology and dating of the events in Paul's life are still disputed among scholars.

| Year | The Life of Paul | Books Written | Historical Events |
|---------|--|---------------|--|
| AD 4 | | | Augustus adopts Tiberius and recognizes him as the successor |
| c. 5 | Born—an Israelite—in Tarsus of Cilicia (Acts 22:3; Phil 3:5) A Roman citizen by birthright (Acts 22:28) | | |
| 7 | | | Judea becomes a Roman Imperial province |
| 14 | | | Census of Caesar and Tiberius Lyvia poisons Augustus; Tiberius comes into power |
| c.15-20 | At the school of Gamaliel, Jerusalem (Acts 22:3) | | |
| 26 | | | Pilate begins serving as procurator of Judea |
| 28 | | | John the Baptist executed by Herod Antipas |
| 30 | | | Crucifixion of Christ |
| 31(?) | A Pharisee (Phil 3:5) | | |
| c. 32 | Present at Stephen's stoning (Acts 7:58; 8:1) | | |
| c.33-34 | Persecutor of the church (Acts 8:1-3; Phil 3:6) | | |
| 34 | Conversion on the Road to Damascus (Acts 9:1-9) Goes to Damascus (Acts 9:10-19) Travels to Arabia and remains there (Gal 1:17) | | |
| 35 | | | |

| Year | The Life of Paul | Books Written | Historical Events |
|------|---|---------------------|--|
| 36 | | | Imprisonment of Herod Agrippa |
| 37 | Returns to Damascus then exits the city for safety (Gal 1:17; Acts 9:20-25; 2 Cor 11:32-33) Goes up to Jerusalem (Acts 9:26-29; Gal 1:18) Goes back to Tarsus for safety (Acts 9:30) | Caligula (AD 37-41) | Caligula becomes emperor at the death of Tiberius |
| 38 | | | |
| 39 | | | Herod Antipas deposed by Caligula and exiled to Gaul |
| 40 | | | |
| 41 | | | Caligula murdered Claudius declared emperor |
| 42 | | | Famine in Rome |
| 43 | | | Roman campaigns against Britain |
| 44 | | | Death of Herod Agrippa I |
| 45 | | | |
| 46 | Barnabas travels to Tarsus in order to seek Saul (Acts 11:25) | | |
| 47 | Goes to Antioch with Barnabas teaching and many people (Acts 11:26) Agabus prophesies a famine (Acts 11:27, 28) Aid sent to Jerusalem through Barnabas and Saul (Acts 11:29, 30) Barnabas and Saul return with John Mark (Acts | | |

| Year | The Life of Paul | Books Written | Historical Events |
|------|--|--------------------------|-------------------|
| 48 | <p>12:25)</p> <p>Barnabas and Saul "separated" and sent out (Acts 13:2, 3)</p> <p>They travel from Antioch to Seleucia, then to Cyprus (Acts 13:4)</p> <p>While on Cyprus they go to Salamis and Paphos (Acts 13:5-12)</p> <p>From Paphos they go to Perga of Pamphylia where John Mark departs for home (Acts 13:13)</p> <p>Ministry in Antioch of Pisidia (Acts 13:14-50)</p> <p>At Iconium (Acts 13:51 - 14:6)</p> <p>Flees to Lystra and Derbe, preaching the gospel (Acts 14:6-7)</p> <p>In Lystra Paul and Barnabas are mistaken for gods (Acts 14:8-18)</p> <p>Stoned at Lystra, supposed to be dead, but re-enters the city (Acts 14:19-20)</p> <p>Departs with Barnabas to Derbe, preaching the gospel (Acts 14:20-21)</p> <p>They return to Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch to strengthen disciples and appoint elders (Acts 14:21-24)</p> <p>From Pisidia they returned to Antioch of Syria and reported their journey to the church (Acts 14:24-28)</p> | First Missionary Journey | |

| Year | The Life of Paul | Books Written | Historical Events |
|------|--|---------------|---|
| 49 | <p>Goes up to the Jerusalem Council with Barnabas (Acts 15:1-29; Galatians 2:1)</p> <p>Paul and Barnabas return to Antioch of Syria, teaching and preaching (Acts 15:30-35; Galatians 2:11-14)</p> <p>Contention over John Mark; Barnabas and John Mark sail to Cyprus (Acts 15:36-39)</p> | | Claudius expels Jews from Rome and blames it on Chrestus (a possible reference to Christ) |
| | <p>Paul and Silas depart, going through Syria and Cilicia strengthening the churches (Acts 15:40-41)</p> | Galatians (?) | |
| 50 | <p>Goes to Derbe and Lystra and picks up Timothy, strengthening the churches (Acts 16:1-5)</p> <p>They go to Troas and Paul sees a vision of a Macedonian man (Acts 16:6-10)</p> | | The rise of the Zealots |
| 51 | <p>They sail from Troas to Neapolis (Acts 16:11)</p> <p>To Philippi where Paul meets Lydia (Acts 16:12-15)</p> <p>Paul and Silas imprisoned after casting out a demon from a slave girl (Acts 16:16-25)</p> <p>Prison doors opened miraculously and the jailer saved (Acts 16:25-34)</p> <p>Departs from Philippi (Acts 16:35-40)</p> <p>They passed through</p> | | |

Second Missionary Journey

| Year | The Life of Paul | Books Written | Historical Events |
|------|--|---|-------------------------------|
| | Amphipolis and Apollonia (Acts 17:1) | | |
| | At Thessalonica and preached Christ, but had to flee (Acts 17:1-10) | | |
| | At Berea where he leaves Silas and Timothy (Acts 17:10-14) | | |
| 52 | At Corinth and rejoined with Silas and Timothy (Acts 18:1-17) | Galatians (?) 1 Thessalonians 2 Thessalonians | |
| 53 | Paul returns to Antioch after stopping at Ephesus, Caesarea, and Jerusalem (Acts 18:18-22) | | |
| | Travels through Galatia and Phrygia strengthening the disciples (Acts 18:23) | Third Missionary Journey | |
| | Passes through the upper regions on his way to Ephesus (Acts 19:1) | | |
| 54 | Ministry in Ephesus (Acts 19:1-41) | | |
| | | | Claudius poisoned by his wife |
| 55 | | 1 Corinthians | Nero [AD 54-68] |
| 56 | Goes to Macedonia (Acts 20:1) | 2 Corinthians | |
| | Travels to Greece (Acts 20:2) | Romans | |
| | Goes back to Macedonia (Acts 20:3) | | |
| | At Troas (Acts 20:4-12) | | |
| | Assos. Mitylene. Chios. Samos. Togyllium. (Acts 20:13-15) | | |
| | Paul exhorts the Ephesian elders at Miletus (Acts | | |

| Year | The Life of Paul | Books Written | Historical Events |
|------|--|-----------------|--|
| 57 | 20:15-38) | | |
| | Cos. Rhodes. Patara. | | |
| | Phoenicia. (Acts 21:1, 2) | | |
| | At Tyre (Acts 21:3-6) | | |
| | At Ptolemais (Acts 21:7) | | |
| | At Caesarea (Acts 21:8-14) | | |
| | At Jerusalem (Acts 21:15-25) | | |
| | Paul gets arrested in the temple and causes a mob (Acts 21:26-36) | | |
| | Addresses the mob (Acts 21:37 - 22:21) | | |
| | Paul's citizenship saves him from scourging (Acts 22:22-29) | | |
| 59 | Before the Sanhedrin (Acts 22:30 - 23:10) | | |
| | Jesus tells Paul that he will bear witness of him in Rome (Acts 23:11) | | |
| | The plot against Paul's life (Acts 23:12-22) | | |
| | Sent safely to Felix the governor (Acts 23:23-35) | | |
| | Paul before Felix (Acts 24:1-27) | | |
| | Paul before Festus (Acts 25:1-12) | | |
| | Paul's appeal honored - turning point towards Rome (Acts 25:12) | Journey to Rome | Assassination of Agrippina, the mother of Nero |
| | Paul before Agrippa (Acts 25:13 - 26:32) | | |
| | Paul departs for Rome and sails to Myra (Acts 27:1-5) | | |
| | They sail to Fair Havens | | |

| Year | The Life of Paul | Books Written | Historical Events |
|------|--|--------------------------|--|
| | on Crete (Acts 27:6-8) | | |
| | In spite of Paul's warning, they set sail again (Acts 27:9-12) | | |
| | In the midst of a terrible storm they get shipwrecked on the island of Malta (Acts 27:13 - 28:1) | | |
| | At Malta (Acts 28:2-10) | | |
| | Sails to Syracuse (Acts 28:11, 12) | | |
| | Sails to Rhegium then Puteoli (Acts 28:13) | | |
| 60 | Arrives in Rome (Acts 28:14-16) | First Roman Imprisonment | |
| | Meets with the Jews (Acts 28:17-28) | | |
| 61 | Preaches the gospel without hindrance for two whole years in his rented house (Acts 28:30-31). | | |
| 62 | Released from Roman imprisonment | | |
| | Further missionary work | 1 Timothy (c. 62-64) | |
| 63 | | Titus (c. 62-64) | |
| 64 | | | The Great Fire in Rome; Major persecution of Christianity begins |
| | | | Josephus pleads the interests of the Jews before Rome |
| | | 2 Timothy (c. 64-66) | Nero constructs the Domus Aurea |
| 65 | | | |

| Year | The Life of Paul | Books Written | Historical Events |
|------|--|---------------------------|--|
| 66 | Second imprisonment and martyrdom under Nero | Second Roman Imprisonment | The beginning of the Jewish Revolt against Rome |
| 67 | | | Josephus surrenders to the Romans |
| 68 | | | Nero commits suicide |
| 69 | | | Vespian prevails as the Emporer amidst civil war |
| 70 | | Vespian (AD 69-79) | Destruction of the temple under Titus |

Questionnaire on Acts

(Read for print just as it is)

Read all of the references given in the questions. They will give you a better understanding.

You may use your Bible to answer the Study Questions.

Chapter 1

1. How do we know Luke is the author of Acts (Acts 2:1-2; Lu. 1:1-4; 24:44-53)?
2. What did Christ do during the forty days after his resurrection?
3. What charge did he give the apostles just prior to his ascension?
4. What question did they ask when he told them that they would "be baptized in the Holy Spirit not many days hence"?
5. What reply did Jesus give?
6. About how many years does the book cover? Prove your answer (Acts 1:4-9; 28:30,31).
7. When were the apostles to receive power?

8. What was to come when the power came (Mk.9:1)?

9. The apostles were to be witnesses of Christ first in _____ and _____
- _____ and then in _____ and then unto _____.

10. Give two things that the angels told the disciples after the ascension of Christ.

1.

2.

11..What did the disciples do during the time between the ascension and Pentecost (Acts 1:12-14)?

What does 1:14 tell us about how the brothers of Jesus had changed (Jn.7:3- 5)?

12. Give the details of the selection of an apostle to take Judas' place.

1.

2.

3.

13. Pentecost followed what other annual feast of the Jews (Lev.23:4-21,39-44; Deut.16:1-17)?

14. By what names is the feast called in the Old Testament? Why the different names (Lev.23:9-21; Dt.16:9-12)?

CHAPTER 2

15. What does the word Pentecost mean in Greek? See McGarvey's Commentary on Acts. Show how the feast would always occur on the first day of the week (Lev.23:15-16).

16. What people had gathered together in Jerusalem to keep the feast?

17. How did the Holy Spirit come upon the apostles?

1.

2.

3.

18. Give four things which show that the apostles were the only ones baptized with the Holy Spirit on Pentecost (Acts 1:5, 1:29, 2:1-4, 2:6-7, 2:14; Jn. 14:26, 16:7-14).

1.

2.

3.

4.

19. What were some of the peculiar things about the manifestation of tongues?

1.

2.

20. What caused the multitude to come together (2:5-6)?

21. How does Luke describe the reaction of the multitude?

22. What did Peter tell them about the prophecy of Joel?

What is the meaning of "the last days" as used in this passage and a number of other passages (Isa.2:1-4, Micah 4:1-4; Heb. 1:2; I Tim. 4:1-3; II Tim.3:1-5)?

23. Why did Peter quote from Psa. 16:8-11?

24. What did he say about David's throne (Acts 2:29-35)?

25. What promise is he referring to in Acts 2:33? See the outline, Christ Is Now Reigning On David's Throne.

26. Read: (IIS.7:12-17; Ps. 89:3-4, 89:28-37; I Chr. 29: 23; Amos 9:11-12; Acts 15:13-19; Isa.9:6-; Zech.6:12-13; Jer.23:5-6; Jer. 22:24-30; Mt.1:12; Lu.1:31-33; I Chr.29:23; Acts 2:24 35;Heb.1:13; Eph. 1:19-23; I

Cor.15:22-26) and then list six things that the Bible teaches about the throne of David. See outline and tell passages that each point is based on. Question counts 6 points

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

6.

27. What did some ask Peter after he said, "that God hath made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom ye crucified?"

28. What did Peter tell them?

29. Show that "for (KJV), or unto (ASV)" in Acts 2:38 does not mean "because of" as some teach (Mt.26:28). See Turner's Comments.

30. How did Peter exhort the people?

31. What were the three thousand converts added unto?

32. In what things did they continue steadfastly?

33. On what occasion is it stated that the disciples were “having favor with all the people”?

Chapter Three

34. Give four of the main points concerning the miracle performed by Peter at the Beautiful Gate of the temple.

1.

2.

3.

4.

35. What seems to have been the primary purpose of the miracle?

36. What did Peter preach in this second sermon?

37. Why did the Jews crucify Jesus (Acts 3:17)?

38. What interpretation did Peter give of the prophecy of Moses?

Chapter Four

39. Who arrested Peter and John and why (Acts 4:1-3)?

40. What were two of the results of Peter's second sermon?

1.

2.

41. What questions did the council ask Peter and John?

42. Give three points of Peter's reply.

1.

2.

3.

43. What did the council say about the miracle (Acts 4:15-16)?
44. What did Peter and John say when they charged them "not to speak at all nor teach in the name of Jesus"?
45. Why didn't the council punish them (Acts 4:21)?
46. Why did the disciples quote from the second Psalm in their prayer to God?
47. What were the two requests that they made in their prayer?
- 1.
 - 2.
48. What happened immediately after their prayer?
49. Were the disciples in Jerusalem commanded to sell their possessions? Why did they? What did they do with the money?
- 1.
 - 2.
 - 3.
50. Why did the apostles change Josephs' name to Barnabas?

Chapter Five

51. What was the sin of Ananias and Sapphira?

52. Did the severe discipline tear up the church (Acts 5:14)?

53. Tell about the healing done by the apostles following the death of Ananias and his wife? Were any sent away unhealed?

1.

2.

3.

54. Who arrested all of the apostles?

55. Who released them? Why?

56. What did the high priest ask the apostles?

57. What did he say about the blood of Christ? What had the disobedient Jews said about His blood (Mt. 27:25)?

58. What were the two main points of the reply given by Peter and the apostles?

1.

2.

59. Who kept the council from slaying the apostles? How?

60. What did the council do to them?

61. What was the reaction of the apostles?

Chapter 6

62. What complaint did the Grecian Jews make against the Hebrews?

63. What did the apostles tell their brethren to do about the complaint? What kind of men were they to choose?

64. What lesson should we learn from the statement of the apostles in Acts 6:2?

65. The seven appointed were all _____ Jews.

66. Why did the apostles lay their hands on the seven (Acts 6:8, 8: 5-8, 8: 14-18, I Cor. 1:7, 12:4-11; II Tim. 1:6)?

67. Were any signs and wonders done by any except the apostles before the appointment of the seven? What does this indicate?

68. What charges did the false witnesses make against Stephen (Acts 6:13-15)?

Chapter Seven

69. Did he answer their charges? What did he do in his speech to the council?

70. How did he conclude his speech? How was his conclusion similar to Christ's speech to the scribes and Pharisees (Mt.23:29-36)?

71. What was the reaction of the council?

72. What request did Stephen make as they were stoning him to death?

73. List two things that Luke tells us about Saul in connection with the death of Stephen (Acts 7:58, 8:1-3).

1.

2.

Chapter Eight

74. What happened when the disciples were scattered abroad?

75. What signs and wonders were done by Philip at Samaria?

76. What three things did he preach to them about (Acts 8:12)?

1.

2.

3.

77. Why did the apostles send Peter and John to Samaria? Why didn't Philip impart gifts of the Spirit to the Samaritans?

78. What did Simon try to buy from the apostles? Does this indicate that he had never been converted (Acts 8:18, 8:13; Mk. 16:15-16)?

79. What did Peter tell him to do? Why is Peter's command here called "God's second law of pardon?"

See I Jn. 1:7-9.

80. Why did Philip leave Samaria and go toward Gaza?

81. Who told him to go and "join thyself to this chariot"?

82. What was the Ethiopian eunuch doing when Philip ran to him?

83. List four things which indicate that the eunuch was a very sincere man, and wanted to know the Lord's will.

1.

2.

3.

4.

84. How do we know that there was sufficient water in this desert country to immerse the eunuch?

1.

2.

85. What happened to Philip after the conversion of the eunuch? The eunuch? Why?

1.

2.

3.

86. Why didn't the angel of the Lord tell the eunuch what he needed to do in order to be saved (II Cor.4:5-7)?

Chapter Nine

87. Why was Saul going to Damascus?

88. Why did the Lord appear to him (Acts 9:15-16, 22:14-21, 26:15-20)?

89. What did the Lord tell him to do?

90. Why did God send Ananias to Saul, and what did he tell Saul to do (Acts 22:16)?

91. Why did the Jews in Damascus take counsel to kill Saul? How did he escape?

92. Where did Saul go before he went to Jerusalem (Gal.1:15- 17)?

93. Who carried him to the apostles? Why? How long was this after his conversion?

94. What miracle did Peter perform at Lydda? At Joppa?

95. What kind of woman was Dorcas?

Chapter Ten

96. What does chapters nine, ten, sixteen, and eighteen teach

about how God answers the prayers of alien sinners (Acts9:6- 11,10:3-5,10:25-33,16:8-15,18:8-9)?

97. Why didn't the angel of the Lord tell Cornelius what to do to be saved? What did he tell him (Acts 10:22-23)?

1.

2.

98. Why did Peter receive the vision of the sheet and all manner of four footed beasts?

99. Note that Cornelius sent messengers for Peter on the ninth hour Jewish time (three P.M.) of the day. They arrived at Joppa "on the morrow" at about the sixth

hour or 12AM. Peter lodged them and "on the morrow he arose and went forth with them." They arrived in Caesarea on the fourth day, on the same hour that they had started, making exactly three days as we count time. Question: Why did Cornelius say, "four days ago until this hour" (Acts 10:3-8, 9, 19, 23-24, 30)?

100. What had Cornelius done by the time Peter arrived at his house?

101. What did he do when Peter came to his house? What did Peter tell him?

102. What question did Peter ask Cornelius? What was his reply?

103. When did the Holy Spirit fall on Cornelius and those gathered at his house?

104. Were they baptized with the Holy Spirit? Give proof for your answer (Acts 10:44-48, 11:12-18).

105. What seems to have been the primary purpose of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on these Gentile people? See Turner's Comments.

1.

2.

106. What did Peter command them to do ? Why?

Chapter Eleven

107. Why did "they that were of the circumcision" contend with Peter?

108. What was their attitude after Peter told them the full story (Acts 11:18)?

109. At what place were the disciples first called Christians? Why (Isa.56:4-5; 62:1-2; Hosea 2:23)?

110. Whom did the apostles send to Antioch? Why? What did he do when he got there?

111. Who assisted Barnabas in his work at Antioch?

112. What did the disciples do after they heard the prophecy of Agabus?

Chapter Twelve

113. What was Herod going to do with Peter? Why?

114. What happened to Peter? Why?

115. What happened a short time later to Herod? Why?

Chapter Thirteen

116. Why did Barnabas and Saul go on the first missionary journey?
117. Who accompanied them on this journey?
118. What two places did they visit on the island of Cyprus?
119. What did they do at each place?
120. Where did they stop after leaving Cyprus? What happened there?
121. Where did they go to do missionary work when they arrived at Antioch of Pisidia?
122. How did Paul conclude his sermon at Antioch?
123. What request did the people make of Paul and Barnabas?
124. Why did the Jews contradict the things spoken by Paul the next Sabbath?
125. What did Paul say to them?
126. What was the attitude of the Gentiles?

127. Comment on the statement, ----"as many as were ordained to eternal life believed" (Acts13:48).

128. Why did Paul and Barnabas leave Antioch so soon (Acts 13:50-51)?

Chapter Fourteen

129. What was the result of their teaching in the synagogue at Iconium (Acts14:5-7)?

130. Why did they leave Iconium (Acts 14:5-7)?

131. At what place did the people attempt to sacrifice to them as gods? Why?

132. How did they later treat Paul in this city?

133. Where did they go after leaving Lystra (Acts 14:20-21)?

134. What places did they revisit on this first journey? What did they do at each church?

135. Why were they able to appoint elders so soon after the churches were established?

136. What did they do when they got back to Antioch of Syria (Acts 14:26-28)?

Chapter Fifteen

137. What kind of false teachers came to the church at Antioch some time after Paul and Barnabas returned from their first journey, and what did they teach (Acts 15:1-2; Gal.1:6- 8, 2:1-5)?

138. What did Paul and Barnabas do about the matter (Acts 15:2; Gal.2:1-5)?

1.

2.

139. Does the Jerusalem conference give authority for church conferences and councils to decide doctrinal questions today (Acts 15:28)?

140. List three main points of Peter's address at the Jerusalem conference. What is the meaning of Acts 15:10?

1.

2.

3.

141. What application did James make of Amos 9:11-12 (Acts 15:13- 18)? Which James is he ? What did he recommend? See Turner's Comments.

1.

2.

3.

142. What two things did the church at Jerusalem do to try to solve the problem about circumcision and the keeping of the law?

1.

2.

143. Did it solve the problem? Why? What lesson should we learn from this (Gal. 1:6-7; 2:1-5; 4:17, 6:13; Phil. 3:2-6; 3:17-19; Col. 2:8-12; 2:16-17; I Tim. 1:3-7; Titus 1:10-11; II Cor. 11:10-15; 12:11-13; Rom. 2:25-29; Rom. 16:17-18)?

1.

2.

3.

144. What caused the separation between Paul and Barnabas? Which one was wrong about the matter?

145. Who did Paul choose for his second journey? What direction did they go?

Chapter Sixteen

146. How may we account for the fact that Paul had Timothy circumcised and refused to have Titus circumcised (Acts 16:1-3; Gal. 1:1-5)?

1.

2.

147. What churches made up "the churches of Galatia"? See Turner's Comments.

148. What did Paul and Silas deliver to the churches as they went on their way through the cities?

149. What places did Paul want to go on this journey that he did not go? Why?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

150. What vision did Paul receive at Troas?

151. Who joined the company of Paul, Silas, and Timothy at Troas? Prove your answer (Acts 13:4, 13:14, 14:1, 14:7, 14:27, 16:6-8, 16:10, 16:12, 16:13). See Turner's Comments.

152. Where did they do their first preaching at Philippi? Why didn't they go to a Jewish synagogue (Acts 16:12-15, 17:1-2)?

- 1.
- 2.

153. What indicates that there were no infants in Lydia's household?

- 1.
- 2.

154. What did she do immediately after her conversion (Acts 16:15; Phil. 1:3-5)?

155. Why was Paul and Silas put in prison at Philippi?

156. List three notable things that happened at about midnight.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

157. How has Acts 16:29-31 been used to teach false doctrine (Acts 16:31-34; Rom. 10:11-15)?

Is there any Bible proof of any one being saved by Faith alone?

158. How do we know that there were no infants in the jailor's household (Acts 16:32-34)?

159. Why did Paul and Silas refuse to leave the prison when the sergeants told them they could go?

160. What did they do after they were released?

Chapter Seventeen

161. Where did they teach at Thessalonica, and what were the results? What did the Jews accuse them of?

162. What were the results of their teaching in the synagogue at Berea? What good compliment does Luke pay them? Why did Paul leave Berea? What commandment did he send back to Silas and Timothy?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.

163. Where is Luke at this time?

164. Why was Paul's spirit provoked at Athens?

165. What did he do at Athens? What were the results of his efforts?

166. Where did Paul go after he left Athens? Where was Timothy and Silas at this time (Acts 17:15; 1 Thess. 3:1-6; Acts 18:5; II Cor. 11:7-12)?

167. How did Paul begin his work at Corinth? Give some of the details about the city of Corinth.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

168. Why did Paul leave the synagogue? Where did he teach after leaving the synagogue?

- 1,
- 2.

169. What epistles did Paul write during this stay at Corinth (Acts 18:5; I Thess. 3:5-8; I Thess. 1:1; II Thess. 1:1)? These are the first two of Paul's Epistles. See the outline, Information About Paul's Epistles.

170. What message did the Lord give Paul in the night by a vision?

171. What is the meaning of the statement, "for I have much people in this city"?

172. What happened when the Jews carried Paul before Gallio?

173. How was Paul received by the Jews in the synagogue at Ephesus (Acts 18:18-21)? See Turner's Comments.

174. Acts 18:22-23 is telling about the end of _____ and the beginning of the_____.

175. Who came to Ephesus in the time between Paul's second and third journey? What knowledge did he lack? What did Aquila and Priscilla do about it? Where did he go after leaving Ephesus?

176. What regions did Paul go through on his return trip to Ephesus? What did he do in these regions (Acts 18:23)?

Chapter Nineteen

177. What condition did Paul find when he returned to Ephesus? Why were the disciples baptized again? Why didn't Apollos or Aquila and Priscilla do this before Paul returned? See Turner's Comments, and the outline, Six NT Baptisms.

178. Why did Paul lay his hands on the disciples at Ephesus (Acts 19:6)?

179. How long did he teach in the synagogue at Ephesus? Why did he separate the disciples from the synagogue?

180. List three notable things that happened during the two years that Paul taught in the school of Tyrannus.

1.

2.

3.

181. What churches were evidently established during this period of time (Acts 19:10; Rev. 1:19-3:22)?

182. What further plans did Paul have before he sent Timothy and Erastus into Macedonia (Acts 19:21-22)?

183. What epistle did Paul write near the end of his long stay at Ephesus (Acts 19:22; I Cor.16:7-8)?

184. Why did Demetrius call a meeting of the silversmiths? What were the results?

185. How great was the danger for Paul and his companions in travel (Acts 19:29-31; II Cor.1:8-11)?

1.

2.

Chapter Twenty

186. When did Paul leave Ephesus and where did he go, and where was he when he wrote II Corinthians (Acts 20:1-2; II Cor.2:12-13; 7:5-7;9:3-4)?

1.

2.

187. Why did Paul decide to return through Macedonia rather than sail to Syria?

188. Paul wrote _____ (II Cor. 9: 1-5; Rom. 15:22-33) and probably _____ from _____ on his _____ journey in about _____ AD. See Turner's comments and outline on Pauline Epistles.

189. Who accompanied him as far as Asia? Who joined his company again at Philippi? They sailed from Philippi to Troas after what feast? How long had Luke been at Philippi?

1.

2.

3.

4.

190. List three important things that happened on this visit at Troas.

1.

2.

3.

191. Is every New Testament example binding? Discuss.

192. Why did Paul ask the Ephesian elders to come to Miletus?

193. Give four of the main points of his speech to the Ephesian elders. Describe their reaction.

1.

2.

3.

4.

Chapter Twenty-One

194. What did the brethren at Tyre say to Paul "through the Spirit"?

195. What did Agabus, from Judea, have to say to Paul at Caesarea? What did the brethren then do? What reply did Paul give?

1.

2.

3.

196. How was Paul and the messengers of the churches received by James and the elders at Jerusalem? What did they advise Paul to do? Why?

1.

2.

3.

197. What happened when the seven days of purification were almost completed?

198. What request did Paul make of the chief captain as they were bringing him into the castle?

Chapter Twenty-Two

199. Give three of the main points of Paul's defense before the Jews. They listened to Paul until he mentioned what?

1.

2.

3.

200. What did the chief captain intend to do to Paul after he was brought inside the castle? What question did Paul ask him? How did Paul receive his citizenship?

1.

2.

3.

201. Why was the chief captain afraid when he learned that Paul was a Roman citizen?

Chapter Twenty-Three

202. What command did Ananias give after Paul told the council, "Brethren, I have lived in all good conscience until this day"? How did Paul respond?

- 1.
- 2.

203. How did Paul divide the council? Why did his statement divide the council? Who saved Paul from the council?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

204. How was Paul encouraged the following night (Acts 23:11)?

205. What curse did about forty Jews bind themselves under? How did Paul and the chief captain learn about the plot?

- 1.
- 2.

206. What did the captain then do with Paul? What did he say about Paul in his letter to Felix (Acts 23:25-30)?

- 1.
- 2.

Chapter Twenty-four

207. What charges did the Jews bring against Paul in his trial by Felix?

208. Give the substance of Paul's defense. What was the out come of his trial (Acts 24:10-23,27)?

- 1.

2.

209. What did Felix do after hearing Paul "concerning the faith in Christ Jesus"?

210. Why did Felix continue to commune with Paul? Why did he leave him bound when he was succeeded by Festus?

1.

2.

211. How long had Paul been a prisoner when Festus became the next governor?

Chapter Twenty-Five

212. Why did the Jews ask Festus to send Paul back to Jerusalem? How did Festus answer them?

1.

2.

213. What was the outcome of Paul's trial before Festus?

Why did Festus ask Paul if he would go to Jerusalem for trial? How did Paul answer him?

214. Why did Festus want King Agrippa to try Paul? Why was Paul glad to make his defense before King Agrippa?

Chapter Twenty-Six

215. Give the substance of Paul's speech before King Agrippa (Acts 26:1-23).

1.

2.

3.

216. What did Festus say to Paul as he was making his defense? How did Paul reply?

1.

2.

217. What question did Paul ask the King? How did he reply?

1.

2.

218. What was the reaction of all who heard Paul on this occasion (Acts 26:30-32)?

Chapter Twenty-Seven

219. Who had charge of Paul on the voyage to Rome?

220. How do we know that Luke went to Rome with Paul (Acts 27:1)?

221. How did Julius show kindness to Paul when they "touched at Sidon?"

222. What advice did Paul give about the journey while they were at Fair Havens? Why did most of them want to coast along the island to Phoenix?

223. How bad was the storm that caught their ship? What did Paul tell them before the ship was wrecked? 1.

2.

3.

224. How long had they been fasting when Paul encouraged them to eat, and how did he encourage them (Acts 27:34-37)? How many were on the ship?

225. Why didn't the soldiers kill the prisoners when the ship wrecked (Acts 27:42-44)?

Chapter Twenty-Eight

226. Give an account of their landing on the island of Melita.

227. How did the people of the island treat them? What did they say when Paul was bitten by a venomous viper? What did they later say about him?

228. What miracles did Paul perform on this island? How long did they stay at Melita?

229. What happened at Puteoli? Who met them at the Three Travens, and what affect did it have on Paul (Acts 28:15)? 1.

2.

3.

230. What kindness was shown Paul when they reached Rome (Acts 28:15, 30-31)?

231. What was the substance of Paul's address to the chief Jews? How did they reply?

232. What were the results of his preaching to the great company of Jews that came to his lodging later? Why did he quote from Isaiah on this occasion?

233. How long did Paul remain in Rome, and what did he do during this period of time (Acts 28:30-31)? What else did he do during this period of time (Eph. 3:1; 4:1; Col. 4:7-11; Philemon 8- 10; Phil. 1:12-15; 2:23-24)?

Questions on Speaking in Tongues (Glossolalia)

- 1) Is this a supernatural phenomenon?
- 2) Is it an altered state of consciousness, a form of hypnosis or hysteria, or a process of learned behavior?
- 3) Is modern day glossolalia identical with the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost?
- 4) Is it true that modern glossolalia is a spiritual and not a rational language?
- 5) Is glossolalia the "language of the angels?"
- 6) Is glossolalia a manifestation that one has received the Holy Spirit and a fulfillment of the Latter Rain promised in Joel 2:28-29?
- 7) Is glossolalia as practiced by Christians different from glossolalia practiced by non-Christians?
- 8) Is Christian usage of glossolalia from God or, as others hold, from Satan and connected with the demonic?
- 9) What are the results of the investigations done by linguists of various specialties concerning the similarities or differences between Christian glossolalia and pagan glossolalia?
- 10) Where does "speaking in tongues" originate from?
- 11) Do all Christians need to "speak in tongues"?

- 12) Who endorses "speaking in tongues"?
- 13) Does "speaking in tongues" lead to a closer walk with Christ?
- 14) Is "speaking in tongues" the future means to unite all Christians into one single church?
- 15) Are New Testament "speaking in tongues" and modern glossolalia identical or is there a radical difference between them?

The House Church as in Acts

Model for Today



Many today are seeing much fruit through individual house church communities as seen here, as they step out in faith to obey God. The coolest part is that they were new believers at this gathering who have recently made decisions to follow Christ! One by one, as they feel ready for it they will be baptised by immersion too, the only valid baptism in witness of the personal faith in Jesus Christ. It is so important to recognise what happens when the works of Scripture are lived out by ordinary people (lay-people, students, new believers, unpaid, non-professional, etc.) The growth of the Kingdom of God is no longer dependent upon how much money exists, where we “meet”, who will “lead”, how “big” are the projects, etc. When several believers come to this realisation it makes the beginning of a house church movement.

House churches what are they?

What is a house church? We are used to thinking of church as a building, but how does the Bible portray the church? Interestingly, the Bible never uses the

word “church” to describe a building; instead, it gives us the picture of the church as a family. Like a family, there are spiritual mothers, fathers, sisters, and brothers in Christ. The church is called “God’s household” (1 Timothy 3:15). They shared common meals together (Acts 2:46, 1 Corinthians 11:20-21). Lived life together (Acts 2:44-46) and as a family, were to care for and love one another deeply (1 Peter 1:22). Not surprisingly then, the New Testament churches typically met in the homes of believers. Here are some biblical examples of New Testament house churches

- Lydia’s House (Acts 16:40)
- An Upper Room (Acts 20:8)
- Priscilla and Aquila’s house (Romans 16:3-5, 1 Corinthians 16:19)
- Nympha’s house in Laodicea (Colossians 4:15)
- Archippa’s house (Philemon 2)

Some in the West see the house church as a new phenomenon when, in reality, house churches have existed since the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:42-47). Many large churches today started because of a small group meeting in the homes of believers. In China, for example, the house church has been one of the vehicles God used to multiply the number of Chinese disciples from a few thousand in the 1930s to, by some estimates, more than 80 million believers today.

House Church – The Numerous Advantages

- There are many good reasons to consider starting a house church:
- It is a biblical model.
- It is family oriented; parents and children participate together as appropriate.
- People more easily get to know one another in a small group.
- Smaller groups can lead to increased accountability to each other.
- Everyone participates and ministers so people grow in using their spiritual gifts.
- Highly trained pastors are not required in order to lead large numbers of people.
- There is no need for expensive, time-consuming programs.
- House churches direct their finances toward evangelism, community service, or caring for one member’s needs instead of purchasing expensive buildings.
- They are low profile and thus, better able to withstand persecution and oppression.
- What do people do in house churches? Acts 2:42-47 gives us an outline of what should happen in house church. Believers devote themselves to...

The Apostle's teaching – reading, studying, and discussing God's Word. Fellowship – being with each other, enjoying one another, and encouraging one another.

- Breaking of bread - sharing meals together and participating in the Lord's Supper.
- Prayer – praying for one another's needs and for advancing God's kingdom.
- Being together – hanging out and living in harmony with one another.
- Giving – providing for one another's needs and for outreach. Worship – praising and glorifying God through word and music.

House Church – A Way to Reach a New Generation?

Are we saying that a house church is the only legitimate way to “do” church? No, but house churches are a biblical model and are “real” churches with a number of advantages. Just as there are many different flavours of ice cream, so churches come in many different flavours. While the house church may not appeal to everyone, they may be a wonderful alternative to reach and disciple new generations who are not familiar with or may be uncomfortable in a traditional church setting.

The house churches provided a fertile seedbed for the most revolutionary equalization of racial class, and sexual distinctions brought about by the Christ event.

The most revolutionary change the New Testament house churches enjoyed was the radical equalization of the sexes in the community of faith. Although the cross eradicated racial and class distinctions of "Jew and Gentile, slave and free," it triumphed most critically in the "male nor female" demolition in Christ, where it reached the depths of the human dilemma (Gal. 3:28). The liberating edict for the new community in Christ eliminated all sinful and debilitating social categories. No longer, said Paul, can categories remain in Christ. Not only must the Jew forthrightly stop considering the Gentile a second-class citizen, and not only must the master step down to the same level as the slave, but most radically of all, the male must now realize that there is no distinction based on gender. The texts of that revolutionary gospel and the co-ministry and role of women in the New Testament house churches can be summarized around nine theses.⁷

Women, alongside men, were full-membered participants in the house-churched Christian communities.

Women, side by side with men, were partners in leadership and ministry in the early house churches.

- Women, along with men, led in public prayer.
- Women, alongside men, prophesied in church.
- Women, with and in the presence of men, had authority in the church body.
- Women, in particular, were encouraged to learn the scriptures.
- Women, even as men, had gifts for edifying the body.
- Wives, as well as their husbands, were partners in mutual submission, arising out of their mutual love.
- Women's sexual roles were not dichotomized or considered at variance with men's roles in Christ.

Over the centuries the church at large has routinely restricted the role of women to secondary positions in ministry, both at home and in mission abroad. This reality causes Virginia Patterson to ask, "Is fulfilment of the Great Commission hindered because women are not equal co-workers in all levels of decision-making and mission activity?" Her answer is unequivocally "yes" for historical, theological, and psycho-social reasons.

In their extensive treatment of ministering women, Tucker and Liefeld show that history has demonstrated the powerful force women are in world evangelism. They warn, however, that "the future growth of the Christianity in the Third World depends to a large extent on how women are incorporated into the total life and ministry of the church. Furthermore, because women have suffered formidable neglect in mission histories, Frances Hiebert asserts that Western mission agencies need "to repent and look for some ashcloth if they are not going to lose their credibility vis-à-vis the church in the Two Thirds World".

Cultural ambivalence among Third World Christian women will no doubt increase as they become acquainted with current biblical studies on the role and ministry of women. Women in the church there will long remain an untapped resource, however, as research on the relation between Third World women and churches gradually increases. African seminary women portrayed sharp cultural ambivalence in a recent course I taught relating womanhood and culture to biblical data. Having been systematically bombarded both from a patriarchal society and from Western missionary preaching on sexual hierarchicalism, they experienced a kind of therapeutic catharsis when continually confronted with the liberating Word. Their most recurring emotional amazement was to learn that

their inner longings to be co-participants in ministry were God-given desires as persons co-equal in God's image and calling, rather than guilt with which they must constantly struggle.

Christian Fellowship - Christian Companionship

Christian fellowship occurs when two or more Christians are in one another's company. The dictionary defines fellowship as "friendly association with others; companionship." Christian fellowship, then, involves friendly association with other Christians. It means you choose Christians to be your companions.

Christian Fellowship - What Does it Mean for Me?

Christian fellowship begins through a process of adoption. Are you a Christian today? If you are, you have been adopted by God. You may have heard it said that we are all God's children, but the truth is, we don't become God's children until we are adopted, through faith in Christ.

He predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will. (Ephesians 1:5)

If we were all God's children by virtue of being His creation, then adoption wouldn't be necessary. Ask any parents of adopted children and they'll tell you the process is long, hard and painful! Why would God choose adoption if we were already His children? Because God longs to have you as His child, He sacrificed Himself, in the person of Jesus Christ, on the cross in order to purchase your salvation.

So if you've received Christ as your personal Saviour and Lord, congratulations! You are now a member of God's family.

Christian Fellowship - Like-minded Communion

After adoption, Christian fellowship grows naturally. Because it's natural for us to want to be around people like ourselves, in time you'll find yourself desiring the companionship of people who think like you do. As a Christian, depending on where you live on this planet, your beliefs may now be in stark contrast to the society around you. That desire for fellowship with "like-thinkers" is God-given.

If you ignore it, or think that by hanging around with "Christians" your non-believing friends will think you're not "cool," you deny yourself the companionship of your new family members, stunt your Christian growth - and worse, you open yourself to risk.

One phenomena common to all believers is the recognition that without Christ, our spiritual understanding was dark. Some even say, "It's as if I stumbled in the darkness, and then God threw on the light switch." Unbelievers are still living in spiritual darkness. While God desires that we live among them and share what we have learned with them, we are called to be separate in our choice of close companions, and for a very good reason! Paul tells us why:

*Do not be yoked together with unbelievers. For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? And what fellowship can **light** have with **darkness**? (2 Corinthians 6:14)*

If you seek out fellowship with other believers, you will find yourself surrounded by new friends who'll think you're very "cool" - because God thinks so, too! And through that new friendship, you'll discover that the light only gets brighter.

Christian Fellowship - Where Do I Find It?

Christian fellowship is critical! Being in the company of people who think like you do is very important to your growth and survival as a Christian. If you live in a church-wealthy community, you are likely to find that companionship. Most churches offer some kind of small group experience that you can become a part of. If you can't find satisfying fellowship at your church, it's possible God wants to move you somewhere else. Consider that option and pray! God will direct your heart.

But what if you don't have great churches around you? Where then do you go to find Christian fellowship?

Christian Fellowship - Where Can I Connect?

Where can you find Christian fellowship? You may be surprised to discover that God has placed Christians almost everywhere. They are where you work, where you go to school, where you shop-even in your own neighborhood. If you desire to meet other Christians where you live, and if your church does not offer small group opportunities-pray! God knows the desires of your heart. After all, He gave them to you! He is just waiting for you to ask His direction. Then comes the next important step on your part-you must listen for His answer. Be bold enough to ask when you think you may have met another believer. One way or another, your inquiry is likely to result in an opportunity to share your faith.

The Internet has become a whole new world for connecting with people of almost any interest. While it is not the best place for the kind of face-to-face fellowship we all need, it can offer opportunities to at least hook up with some

like-minded believers. And if you are here, reading this page, you have figured out how to use the Internet to make connections.

Christian Fellowship - Why Do I Need It?

Christian fellowship is essential for our growth. Rick Warren says, "The entire Bible is the story of God building a family who will love Him, honor Him, and reign with Him forever."

As a child, you needed your family to help you grow. You needed a mother to nurture you, a dad to show you how to ride your bike without falling down. As a believer, you need mothers and fathers, brothers and sisters in Christ, to teach you how to love as God loves. Those family members may be older Christians who can teach you what it means to be a Christian, or they may be newcomers to the faith, who need a guiding hand from you. Or they may simply be your peers, sailors in the same boat, figuring out life together.

What does the Bible say about Christian fellowship? Of the early church, Luke says:

They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer (Acts 2:42).

From the very beginning, Christians knew they needed each other for survival. In this often upside down world, so do you!

Christian Fellowship - Completing Your Faith

As a member of God's family, you are called into Christian fellowship:

God, who has called you into fellowship with his Son Jesus Christ our Lord, is faithful (1 Corinthians 1:9).

That's an amazing truth! As a believer in Christ, you now can have fellowship with Jesus Christ Himself! What's more, Paul tells us that as Christians we have the mind of Christ!

"For who has known the mind of the Lord that he may instruct him?" But we have the mind of Christ (1 Corinthians 2:16).

Have you ever noticed the abundance of "how to" books out there in the stores, and the numbers of talk shows on TV? None of us can survive on our own. We all need and crave the advice of others. As a Christian you need the fellowship of other believers to complete your own understanding. For a healthy Christian life, you need to grow in knowledge and understanding of Christ through time spent alone with God, through ministering to the needs of other Christians,

through sharing the faith God has given you with others and through spending time in Christian fellowship. Then you will be magnifying God in all your ways!

Christian Fellowship - A Communion of Grace

As far as Christian fellowship, we leave you with these words from our brother, the Apostle Paul:

May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all (2 Corinthians 13:14).

Christian Love - Christ's Commandment

What's at the heart of Christian love? Jesus said, "By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another" (John 13:35). John, inspired by the Holy Spirit, once wrote, "We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love the brethren. He who does not love his brother abides in death" (1 John 3:14). And "by this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and keep His commandments. For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments. And His commandments are not burdensome" (1 John 5:2-3).

Christian Love - Not a Feeling, a Lifestyle

So, what do these scriptures regarding "Christian love" really mean? Is it a warm fuzzy feeling? I don't have a warm fuzzy feeling for everyone I meet, Christian or otherwise -- does that mean I'm not saved? No, a "warm fuzzy feeling" is not the biblical definition for "love". So, what is the Biblical definition for love? Let's search the Scriptures and find out...

A Pharisaic lawyer once asked our Lord, "Teacher, which is the great commandment in the law?" Jesus said to him, 'You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets" (Matthew 22:36-40).

According to Matthew's Gospel, the very essence of the Law and the Prophets is to love God and to love others. And we see this term "the Law and the Prophets" used in one other place in Matthew's Gospel. It's in this passage that we find the Biblical definition for love: "Therefore, whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets" (Matthew 7:12).

Would you want your wife to commit adultery? Would you want someone to murder you or to murder someone you love? Would you want someone to steal from you, lie to you, covet your possessions? Of course not! So don't go and do these things to other people! Paul, inspired by the Holy Spirit, commands us to "owe no one anything except to love one another, for he who loves another has fulfilled the law. For the commandments, 'You shall not commit adultery,' 'You shall not murder,' 'You shall not steal,' 'You shall not bear false witness,' 'You shall not covet,' and if there is any other commandment, are all summed up in this saying, namely, 'You shall love your neighbour as yourself.' Love does no harm to a neighbour; therefore love is the fulfilment of the law" (Romans 13:8-10).

In Luke's Gospel, Jesus elaborates on this "do unto others as you would have them do unto you" principle. He says, "Give to everyone who asks of you. And from him who takes away your goods do not ask them back. And just as you want men to do to you, you also do to them likewise. But if you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. And if you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners do the same. And if you lend to those from whom you hope to receive back, what credit is that to you? For even sinners lend to sinners to receive as much back. But love your enemies, do good, and lend, hoping for nothing in return; and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High. For He is kind to the unthankful and evil. Therefore be merciful, just as your Father also is merciful" (Luke 6:30-36).

Christian Love - Selfless and Giving Love

Christian love is giving to others those things that you would want them to give you if you were in their situation -- and it's doing so even if they can't pay you back. In fact, it's doing so especially if they can't pay you back! Christian love is respect for others. It's mercy. It's charity.

When the King James translators came upon the Greek word *agape* (God's Love), in addition to using the English word "love" to transliterate it, they often chose the English word "charity." This was meant to reinforce the idea that *agape* is a selfless, giving love. God's Love is unselfish and unconditional. Now we know what is meant by Christian love. Now we know what to strive for...

Living Sacrifice - A Biblical Truth As Christians, we're called to give ourselves to God as a "living sacrifice." The Apostle Paul helps us understand this truth in his letter to the believers in Rome: I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this

world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God. (Romans 12:1-2)

Living Sacrifice - Dying to Self So, how do we truly present ourselves to God as a living sacrifice? In a nutshell, we must die to our prior selves. This concept is wonderfully presented in this anonymous poem... When you are forgotten, neglected, or purposely set at naught, and you don't sting or hurt with the oversight, but your heart is happy being counted worthy to suffer for Christ; That is dying to self. When your good is evil spoken of, when your wishes are crossed, your advice disregarded, your opinion ridiculed, and you refuse to let anger rise in your heart or even defend yourself, but take it all in patient, loving silence; That is dying to self. When you lovingly and patiently bear any disorder, any irregularity, any annoyance; when you can stand face to face with waste, folly, extravagance, spiritual insensibility, and endure it as Jesus did; That is dying to self. When you are content with any food, and offering, any raiment, any climate, any society, any solitude, any interruption by the will of God; That is dying to self. When you never care to refer to yourself in conversation or record your own good works or itch after commendation, when you can truly love to be unknown; That is dying to self. When you can see your brother prosper and have his needs met, and can honestly rejoice with him in spirit and feel no envy, nor question God, while your own needs are far greater and you are in desperate circumstances; That is dying to self. When you can receive correction and reproof from one of less stature than yourself and can humbly submit, inwardly as well as outwardly, finding no rebellion or resentment rising up within your heart; That is dying to self.

Fruit of the Spirit - Visible Growth in Jesus Christ

"Fruit of the Spirit" is a biblical term that sums up the nine visible attributes of a true Christian life. Using the King James Version of Galatians 5:22-23, these attributes are: **love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness** and **temperance**. We learn from scripture that these are not individual "fruits" from which we pick and choose. Rather, the fruit of the Spirit is one nine-fold "fruit" that characterizes all who truly walk in the Holy Spirit. Collectively, these are the fruits that all Christians should be producing in their new lives with Jesus Christ.

Fruit of the Spirit - The Nine Biblical Attributes

The fruit of the Spirit is a physical manifestation of a Christian's transformed life. In order to mature as believers, we should study and understand the attributes of the nine-fold fruit:

Love - "And so we know and rely on the love God has for us. God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in him" (1 John 4:16). Through

Jesus Christ, our greatest goal is to do all things in love. "Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails" (1 Corinthians 13:4-8).

Joy - "The joy of the Lord is your strength" (Nehemiah 8:10). "Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God" (Hebrews 12:2).

Peace - "Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ" (Romans 5:1). "May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit" (Romans 15:13).

Longsuffering (patience) -- We are "strengthened with all might, according to his glorious power, unto all patience and longsuffering with joyfulness" (Colossians 1:11). "With all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love" (Ephesians 4:2).

Gentleness (kindness) -- We should live "in purity, understanding, patience and kindness; in the Holy Spirit and in sincere love; in truthful speech and in the power of God; with weapons of righteousness in the right hand and in the left" (2 Corinthians 6:6-7).

Goodness - "Wherefore also we pray always for you, that our God would count you worthy of this calling, and fulfill all the good pleasure of his goodness, and the work of faith with power" (2 Thessalonians 1:11). "For the fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness and righteousness and truth" (Ephesians 5:9).

Faith (faithfulness) - "O Lord, thou art my God; I will exalt thee, I will praise thy name; for thou hast done wonderful things; thy counsels of old are faithfulness and truth" (Isaiah 25:1). "I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith" (Ephesians 3:16-17).

Meekness - "Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted" (Galatians 6:1). "With all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love" (Ephesians 4:2).

Temperance (self-control) - "But also for this very reason, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, to virtue knowledge, to knowledge self-control, to self-

control perseverance, to perseverance godliness, to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness love" (2 Peter 1:5-7).

Fruit of the Spirit - A Devotional for All Christians

The fruit of the Spirit is a wonderful study for Christians at any level of spiritual maturity. We hope this website provides a thought-provoking devotional and a springboard for growth.

God's Love - John 15:13

God's love towards us, His estranged creation, is graphically depicted in the sacrifice He made on our behalf. "Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends" (John 15:13).

Jesus Christ, is God's unique and eternal Son.¹ He is the Alpha and Omega,² the Great I AM,³ the "Mighty God"⁴ by whom all things were created⁵ and in whom all things consist.⁶ Jesus, who is the head of all things,⁷ humbled Himself in such a way that the human mind couldn't even bare the thought of it. He came into this sin-cursed world and actively partook in our sufferings. Even as we are flesh and blood, He shared in the same.⁸ He became a man and dwelt among us.⁹ He shared in the sufferings we brought upon ourselves through our rejection of His holy precepts.¹⁰ And as if that were not enough to convince us of His love and concern for us, Jesus, the immortal God and the Giver of Life, gave up His own life upon the cross in the greatest act of love the world has ever known! In doing so He took our sins away, effectively nailing them to the cross with Himself. Thus, He who knew no sin became sin for us¹¹ and He who gave life to all, tasted death for those condemned to it.¹²

God's Love - For God so Loved the World

This is God's love! "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him" (John 3:16-17). Jesus Christ loved the world so much that He gave everything for it, from His rights and privileges as the unique eternal Son of God, to His very life! If you want to see the love of God, look to the cross. "This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins" (1 John 4:9-10). "For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 6:23).

God's Love - It's For You!

God's love has been made known to us and now He stands at the door and knocks.¹³ It's up to every individual to either pursue a personal relationship with God or else reject Him outright. The only barrier between us and God's love is our own freewill and Jesus Christ is the door.¹⁴ "Jesus answered, 'I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me'" (John 14:6). Salvation is a free gift bought and paid for by the blood of Christ. There is no other way. "...Do not set aside the grace of God, for if righteousness could be gained through the law, Christ died for nothing!" (Galatians 2:21). You can't earn God's forgiveness through good works. How will doing the good works that you should have done all your life make up for the countless times you've failed? God's no fool. You can "use an abundance of soap, the stain of your guilt is still before Me..." (Jeremiah 2:22).

A man once fell on his knees before Christ and begged, "If You are willing, You can make me clean." Christ, "filled with compassion" replied, "I am willing; be clean" (Mark 1:40-41). We too can fall on our knees and acknowledge God's only provision for our sins. We too can hear, "I am willing; be clean." Christ willingly took God's righteous indignation upon Himself so that you don't have to; whoever accepts His death upon the cross as payment for their sins will be reconciled to the God whom they've offended. "All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ...God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them...God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God" (2 Corinthians 5:18-19, 21). Will you accept God's love today?

Footnotes – Scriptural References as numbered above

Bible References: ¹John 1:1-3; 3:16; ²Revelation 1:8; cf. Revelation 1:13-18; 21:4-7; 22:6-7, 12-16, 20 ³John 8:56-59; cf. Exodus 3:13-14; ⁴Isaiah 9:6; ⁵Colossians 1:16; ⁶Colossians 1:17; ⁷Colossians 1:17; 2:10; ⁸Hebrews 2:14; ⁹John 1:14; cf. John 1:1-3; ¹⁰Galatians 6:7; 1 Peter 3:18; ¹¹2 Corinthians 5:21; ¹²Hebrews 2:9; ¹³Revelation 3:20; ¹⁴John 10:1-7.

Read the Bible Online

In English

King James Version (Public Domain Version)

<http://www.allonlinebible.com/>

In Dutch

<http://www.online-bijbel.nl/>

In French

Version Louis Segond (Normalement Domaine Publique)

<http://www.christianevents.mu/lire-bible-francais-louis-segond.html>

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“Looking unto Jesus”

Hebrews 12:2

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